

MISUNDERSTANDING THE OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT: MICHIGAN STATE
UNIVERSITY AND THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE CIVIL GUARD, 1955-1960

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The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the student author and do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College or any other governmental agency. (References to this study should include the foregoing statement.)

ABSTRACT

MISUNDERSTANDING THE OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT: MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY AND THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE CIVIL GUARD, 1955-1960, by Major Bob Stone, 94 pages.

From 1955 to 1962, Michigan State University worked with the US and South Vietnamese governments to assist the Republic of South Vietnam in the establishment of governmental systems and infrastructure. A pivotal and controversial part of this program revolved around the police forces responsible for internal security. The MSU group assisted the South Vietnamese Government to develop police forces. The results were unsatisfactory. Saigon was somewhat secure, but the rural regions of South Vietnam remained prime areas for insurgent activity. These failures at internal security can be, in part, attributed to three main concerns. First was the attempt to impose western style governance procedures on a non-western people. Second, the lack of understanding associated with the complex operational environment. Third was the lack of unity of effort between the MSU Group, the Department of Defense, and other US governmental agencies. These shortfalls contributed to the American failure to construct an effective internal security mechanism that would lead to a viable, non-Communist nation.

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ACRONYMS

CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
DGDP	Directorate of Graduate Degree Programs
FOA	Foreign Operations Administration
GDP	Graduate Degree Programs
MAAG	Military Assistance Advisory Group
MOD	Ministry of Defense
MOI	Ministry of Interior
MSU	Michigan State University
MSUG	Michigan State University Group
SGA	Small Group Advisor
USOM	United States Operations Mission
VBI	Vietnamese Bureau of Investigation

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The United States was involved in the affairs of Vietnam from 1950 to 1975. Over the course of those twenty-five years, the role of the United States and the political landscape changed drastically. By 1956, Vietnam had transitioned from a French colony to two nominally independent countries with their own governments. The two states then found themselves at odds with each other when elections to unify the country did not occur. Internal conflict arose in South Vietnam while North Vietnam began to exert its political influence on the region. By 1960, war had erupted in South Vietnam, first against subversive groups, then against the North Vietnamese Army. Finally, in 1975, the country was united under the North Vietnamese government.

Indo-China, present day Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, became a French colony in the 1800s. The French sought to control the region for its rubber plantations, rice crops, and to bolster French national pride. The region remained under French rule and protection until 1940 when World War II destabilized the French homeland. During this time, the Vichy French government exercised nominal control over Indo-China but Japanese influence in the region limited French control. Once Japan surrendered, France reclaimed Indo-China. Britain and France liberated southern Vietnam while the nationalist Chinese were supposed to repatriate the northern half. The Vietnamese under the Vietminh declared independence in September 1945. When the French refused to relinquish control over the region, the Vietminh began to resist French rule in 1946. The rise of Vietnamese nationalism under the direction of ho Chi Minh and his communist party sought national unity and independence. The clash between the Vietminh and the

French led to the first Indo-China War. The United States, under the auspices of containment, began to see Indo-China as a potential battleground against communist hegemony by 1950.

The Nationalist Chinese government under Chiang K'ai-shek fell to Mao Tse-tung's communist party in 1949. Mao's victory raised concerns about communist influence in Asia. When North Korea invaded South Korea in June 1950, these fears of communist hegemony were confirmed. The Korean War reoriented the United States security efforts from Europe to Asia. As a result, the Truman administration began to supply monetary aid and military advice to France and the Indochinese to prevent a communist takeover. France's efforts to reassert its control over Vietnam ultimately failed when the Vietminh forces under Vo Nguyen Giap defeated the French at Dien Bien Phu in May 1954. Because of the Vietminh victory over French forces, Vietnam was divided temporarily at the seventeenth parallel. North Vietnam was under the communist rule of Ho Chi Minh, South Vietnam looked to the United States for support. The Geneva Accords called for national elections to unify Vietnam in 1956. The election never occurred.

America began nation building efforts in South Vietnam with the assistance of Michigan State University (MSU).¹ The use of an American university to assist in nation building had never been attempted before. America rallied its efforts around Ngo Dinh Diem, a strong, anti-communist individual friendly to the United States. MSU, American diplomats, and the United States military assisted Diem in the establishment of

¹Michigan State University was granted University Status by the state of Michigan in 1955. Before that time, the university is referred to in this paper as "Michigan State" or "college." After 1955, the university is referred to as MSU.

democratic governmental systems. Through the establishment of these systems, Diem avoided the elections that would have resulted in Ho Chi Minh's control over Vietnam.

North Vietnam launched its active campaign against South Vietnam's government in 1958. From that point forward, America began to take a more active role in suppressing the communist influence growing in South Vietnam. By 1962, MSU no longer found a role for itself in South Vietnam as efforts became more focused on military action. In 1965, the Johnson administration deployed American combat formations into South Vietnam. This marked the beginning of the United States' active role in securing a non-communist, independent South Vietnam. The fighting reached a crescendo in 1968 with a large-scale North Vietnamese and Viet-Cong offensive during the Tet holiday. The United States began to seek an alternative to additional combat and monetary support as popular support for the war waned in America. The Nixon administration began withdrawing combat troops from South Vietnam in 1969 through 1973 when the last combat formations left South Vietnam. The war between North and South Vietnam did not end with the US withdrawal following the 1973 Paris Peace Accords. In April 1975, the North Vietnamese Army secured the presidential palace and ended the war. Vietnam was now united under a single communist government.

Between 1954 and 1959, a window of opportunity existed to establish a free and independent South Vietnam free of communist influence. To a large extent, academic professionals from MSU had a chance to shape the future of South Vietnam. MSU conducted a country survey and assembled various teams to assist South Vietnam in constructing a viable nation. One of the MSU areas of focus was the South Vietnamese police forces. MSU personnel determined that the South Vietnamese Civil Guard was one

of the most vital and yet one of the most frustrating organizations upon which to build the nation of South Vietnam.

The South Vietnamese Civil Guard's purpose was to establish rule of law according to the central government in the rural areas of South Vietnam. The United States military, President Diem, and the MSU personnel frustrated this initiative. Because a large portion of South Vietnam's population resided in areas that the Civil Guard policed, the reputation of South Vietnam's central government suffered in the eyes of the population. The failure to properly organize, train, resource, and employ the South Vietnamese Civil Guard allowed a fledgling insurgency to take hold in the impoverished countryside of South Vietnam, which contributed to the escalation of hostilities that took place in the 1960s.

Background

This paper is a result of personal experience from the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq from 2003 to 2011. During that time, the U.S. military attempted to stabilize two countries through the development of security forces. I have personally served as an advisor in both countries. In the prosecution of those assignments, I worked at the tactical level of the advisory chain partnered at the lowest level. Because of my experiences as an advisor, I wanted to look towards the past to see how successful our military had been in previous advisory attempts from a historical perspective.

My initial thoughts were to examine the role of police advisors throughout America's experience in Vietnam. This quickly became too broad of a topic and I struggled to narrow the topic into something appropriate for a thesis. As I went further into history, I came across the Michigan State University Group (MSUG). While

conducting advisory missions, I often wondered why the United States had not used more actual law enforcement officers in advisory roles and had found an example of just that occurring in Vietnam.

Since the Vietnam War fits the U.S. military's current threat doctrine of hybrid warfare, this is an appropriate case study that resonates with current and future nation building efforts. Like the officers of the Vietnam War era who struggled to process the complexity of the situation, leaders in Iraq and Afghanistan struggled to determine the proper mixture of lethal and non-lethal effects to achieve the desired outcome. The focus of study on the Vietnam War has historically been those years under President Lyndon B. Johnson's tenure, a time when the war easily fits into the realm of conventional warfare. It is more prudent to study the war from its inception to understand better how the United States became part of such a conflict and if the escalation that occurred was preventable. The Michigan State University Group (MSUG) experience parallels the United States' initial involvement in Vietnam and offers useful insights into America's nation building efforts.

MSUG had success in public administration, education reform, and civil policing in urban areas. Early reports from the advising element painted an optimistic picture regarding the entire nation building effort. One project that became a point of contention over time, however, was the Civil Guard. After my research trip to East Lansing, Michigan, the idea for this thesis came together. MSU personnel found themselves asking many of the same questions that I asked myself as an advisor. They found some answers to many of their questions, but the failures surrounding the Civil Guard demand more intensive scrutiny to understand more fully the United States' stability efforts in Vietnam.

Historiography

Vietnam is one of the most widely debated and discussed elements of all of America's wars. Tactical formations in the United States military performed the duties they were assigned in accordance with existing doctrine, but ultimately the war is not viewed as a win for the United States. The conflict between the tactical actions, largely from 1965 to 1972, and the strategic goals of five U.S. presidents is at the center of many current debates. The literature on the Vietnam War can be divided into several categories, but in the context of this thesis, it is best divided into writing done during the Cold War and writing completed after the Cold War ended in 1989. By using this division, the Vietnam War can be studied as an independent entity. It certainly took place in the context of the Cold War, but, as recent literature suggests, most agree that communism was a vehicle for North Vietnamese nationalism, not the driving force behind the war.

The earliest book to gain popularity about Vietnam was Bernard Fall's *Street Without Joy*. Fall focused on the French military experience in Indo-China in an effort to explain the complexities of the situation. He attempted to explain how a large French military force lost a war to communist revolutionaries. U.S. military officers going to Vietnam read his book after its publication in 1961.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, academics from Michigan State University published a few books on the subject, but they did not gain popularity. *Viet-Nam the First Five Years* and *Technical Assistance in Vietnam, The Michigan State Experience* were written key examples. The former book was published in 1959 before it was apparent that war would erupt in the next decade. The latter, written by Michigan State personnel who participated in the advising effort, told the university's side of the story. Published in

1965, it was as an attempt to preempt potential accusations that MSU was responsible for the escalation of violence that took place in Vietnam after 1962.

Following the war, a series of overarching histories were written. George Herring published *America's Longest War, The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975* in 1979, Stanley Karnow published *Vietnam, A History* in 1984, and Ronald Spector published *Advice and Support, The Early Years, The U.S. Army in Vietnam* in 1985. These three books approached the history of the Vietnam War from different angles, but all were published shortly after the war ended. During their publication, America was still focused on the defeat of communist expansion across the globe. Each book mentioned the Michigan State advisors, but downplayed their role in the nation building efforts; instead focusing on the U.S. military's experience.

In the 1990s, after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, more books were published that dealt specifically with the early years in Vietnam. *Trapped by Success, the Eisenhower Administration and Vietnam, 1953-1961* by David Anderson, *US Containment Policy and the Conflict in Indo-China* by William Duiker, and *A Time for War, The United States and Vietnam, 1941-1975* by Robert Schulzinger were published between 1991 and 1997. These books were published as the United States searched for a new role on the international stage. With the Soviet Union no longer a perceived threat, the United States became involved in small, limited conflicts such as Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, and Kosovo. These works set the context for American involvement for limited gains. Historians largely ignored the MSUG experience until 1998. It was then that John Ernst published his dissertation *Forging a Fateful Alliance*,

Michigan State University and the Vietnam War. Only after this book was published did Michigan State's role return to the conversation on Vietnam.

After the turn of the century, more authors began to pay attention to the Michigan State efforts. This was partly due to the re-organization of MSU's archives that made them more accessible. Additionally, the United States found itself conducting nation building operations again in Iraq and Afghanistan, wars that many compared to Vietnam. James Carter's work, *Inventing Vietnam, The United States and Nation Building, 1954-1968*, was published in 2008. It was preceded by William Rosenau's *US Internal Security Assistance to South Vietnam, Insurgency Subversion and Public Order* and Phillip Catton's *Diem's Final Failure, Prelude to America's War in Vietnam*.

These works accompanied revisionist works such as Mark Moyer's *Triumph Forsaken: The Vietnam War 1954-1965* and the recently published *Hanoi's War* by Lien-Hang Nguyen. These two books are set apart from the rest because of their use of primary documents regarding the Vietnam War. They provide much-needed context from the North Vietnamese perspective into the discussion surrounding the Vietnam War.

This thesis is an attempt to engage a specific part of the early conflict that may have had significant impact in the larger conflict. It explains why Michigan State's efforts, in specific regards to the Civil Guard, were ultimately a failure. It adds to the historical debate a framework to view nation building efforts by attempting to understand the existing infrastructure in South Vietnam in 1954. It then outlines key events that prevented progress towards a security environment that could have fostered a free, independent, and non-communist South Vietnam.

CHAPTER 2

THE ROAD TO OWNERSHIP

Prior to the war against Japan we had no interests to speak of in Southeast Asia, and we knew even less about it. It is a fault which we are paying very seriously today in the lack of trained personnel, in the lack of people who have lived there many years, who know their way around, and who can move into it easily and come up with their answers, their solutions.²

— John Melby, Speech

The United States Gets Involved

Following World War II, the United States became the dominant military and political power in the Pacific region. As the Soviet Union expanded its influence in Eastern Europe and the Chinese communists assumed power in China, the United States became the protector of democracy in the areas of Asia where such governance remained. With the outbreak of hostilities on the Korean peninsula in June 1950, the United States attempted to stem the flow of communism into another Asian country with military action. The Truman administration's strategy of global containment, first found useful in Europe, coupled with a growing sense of nationalism in once colonial possessions, pulled the United States into armed conflicts across the globe over the next two decades.

In Southeast Asia, Great Britain and France were actively engaged in conflicts against communist expansion. The Second World War had spread to virtually every corner of Asia. Many ethnic Asian peoples felt they deserved equal footing with the Europeans who had treated them as second-class human beings through colonial rule.

²John Melby, Speech (December 10, 1951), 2, Truman Presidential Library, Student Folders, Box 31b, Liberty, MO.

This changed during the war though as the Europeans now needed support of all kinds from the colonies they ruled. Following the war, many Asian colonies, following the lead of India to a large extent, began to develop nationalistic movements with the goal of independence from the European powers.

At the same time, Great Britain fought to stop the spread of Chinese Communism in Malaya. The conflict started in 1948 with attacks against plantation owners and escalated into armed conflict. Great Britain, after a short period of failed programs, eventually developed initiatives to assist the Malayan government in stopping the communist threat. The British placed Malaya on a path to quick independence and used Malayan security forces for the majority of operations. These two factors allowed the British to establish a free and independent government in Malaya. The process was not short; it did not end until 1960.³

The French feared the same thing would happen in Indo-China. Unlike Malaya, Indo-China shared a border with China. This shared border with China changed the way France viewed its problem. The common border meant that not only could China's ideas spread into Indo-China, but men and material were easily moved there as well. From 1946 to 1954, France fought an uphill battle in Indo-China against communist revolutionaries and nationalists. Many Indochinese did not want their nation to become a communist nation, but they also no longer wanted to live under French rule. With these two factors at play and France in ruins following World War II, the French were not in a position to impose their will in Indo-China.⁴

³Noel Barber, *The War of the Running Dogs* (London: Cassell, 1971), 13-327.

⁴Bernard Fall, *Street Without Joy* (New York: Schocken Books, 1961), 22-31.

After the Korean War began, President Harry Truman sent a survey mission to Southeast Asia to develop a deeper understanding of the European struggles in the region.⁵ John Melby, the Deputy Director of the Philippine and Southeast Asian Affairs, US State Department, headed the mission. The mission, announced on July 5, 1950, was to “survey the nature and extent of the US Military Assistance required, the priorities for military aid programs and the nature of advisory groups needed the in the area.”⁶ Melby served as the chairman of the mission and Major General Graves B. Erskine, the commanding general of the 1st Marine Division, was the Department of Defense representative.⁷

The mission arrived in Saigon July 15, 1950, and spent three weeks visiting Saigon, Hanoi, the Red River Delta, Cambodia, and Laos. The mission determined that the greatest threat to Indo-China was the inability of national forces to repel a Chinese communist invasion. At the time, the security of Indo-China was a French problem, but they required US monetary and equipment assistance.⁸ “The major impression of members of the mission [was] that although there [could] be no over-all solution to the Indo-China problem without a military solution as a primary requisite, this military action

⁵The name of the mission was the Joint State-Defense Military Assistance Mission to Southeast Asia, it is more commonly known as the Melby-Erskine mission.

⁶Wireless Bulletin, 5 July 1950, Papers of John F Melby, Truman Presidential Library, Student Files, Box 31b, Liberty, MO.

⁷Ibid.

⁸“Foreign Military Assistance Coordinating Committee- Report No. 1 of the Joint MDA Survey Mission in Southeast Asia,” August 6, 1950, 2. Truman Presidential Library, Student Files, Box 31b, Liberty, MO.

[could] in no sense be decisive without the application of political and economic techniques to the problem.”⁹

The mission reported a dire outlook toward s the political and military situation. It described the French military position as precarious and defense oriented. It also alluded to distrust between French commanders and Vietnamese units. The political situation they observed was not any better. They realized that nationalistic ideas and a deep hatred of the French fueled the insurgency. The report stated that Vietnamese forces protecting Vietnam under an independent government was needed.¹⁰

Despite the perceived fear that China and its massive Army would cross Indo-China’s northern border, the mission also identified an internal security problem. In a military report, General Erskine reported the top French military objective was the restoration of order and internal security within Indo-China. Secondary to that was the security of the frontiers. The three state concept was part of the March 8, 1949 accords, which placed Indo-China on a track to independence, was the lowest military priority.¹¹ Erskine discovered in his conversations with Vietnamese officials that the French authorities’ security priorities bore no resemblance to those of the local population still

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰William J. Duiker, *U.S. Containment Policy and the Conflict in Indo-China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 98-101.

¹¹“Military Group Joint MDAP Survey Mission to SE Asia,” Saigon, Vietnam, August 6, 1950, 3. Truman Presidential Library, Student Files, Box 31b, Liberty, MO. In March 1949, Bao Dai agreed with France that Indo-China would be given its autonomy in the form of three states, Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam.

loyal to France. The report painted a bleak picture of the French garrison at a stalemate, devoid of any offensive spirit, and pinned in garrisoned areas.¹² It stated:

The failure of the French to restore internal security is attributed to the lack of cooperation of the majority of the people in Indo-China and a deep seated hatred and distrust which exists among a large part of the population. A large measure of the distrust and non-cooperative action on the part of the people has undoubtedly been inspired by Communist propaganda and the desire of the Oriental to “push the white man out of Asia.”¹³

The French realized they could not simultaneously protect the northern border from a Chinese invasion and establish internal security to facilitate the establishment of a democratic government.¹⁴ By July 1950, the Vietminh, communist guerrilla fighters, already had a force estimated to be forty battalions strong who continually disrupted French and Indo-Chinese efforts to establish internal security.¹⁵ General Erskine assessed that even though the Vietminh lacked sufficient armament, they equaled the French in discipline and training. This formidable force was only gaining strength and momentum.

The commission developed an understanding of the complex situation in Indo-China. No Americans had ever thought this hard about what it would take to establish independent, democratic governments in the region. The initial report stated that only if appropriate emphasis and resources drove political reform could the military assistance upon which the French were insisting stem the flow of communism into Southeast

¹²Ibid., 14-15.

¹³Ibid., 14.

¹⁴Ibid., 4.

¹⁵Ibid.

Asian.¹⁶ This was a feasible course of action to anyone involved. The only thing that all parties in Indo-China had in common was the desire to remove the control of Western governments. Many Vietnamese were anti-Communists, but they still wanted independence. The communist and nationalist groups sought independence first and the future of the political state and internal security issues were second and third objectives.¹⁷

The United States and France did not share the Indo-Chinese desire to place independence as the first priority. General Erskine reported that the top priority for the French was the restoration of internal security within Indo-China. The US did not share the same vision. The US vision ranked internal security third on its priority list. Quelling the smuggling issue, eliminating threats to the legitimate government, and establishing an organization similar to the US Coast Guard to stop smuggling from the sea all were higher priorities than internal security.¹⁸ The US may have viewed these as stepping-stones to internal security; the report written did not expand upon the reasons for the order.

Initial American efforts to assist France had issues from the French perspective. The French interviewed consistently blamed the US for its lack of support up to this point. The Vietnamese were worn down by empty promises from the French in regards to sovereignty.¹⁹ At this point, the Vietnamese had good reason to be pessimistic. The Vietnamese were still primarily a labor force subordinate to French administrators. In the

¹⁶Report 1 of the Joint MDA Survey Mission, August 6, 1950, 4-5.

¹⁷Ibid., 3.

¹⁸Military Group Survey, August 6, 1950, 1.

¹⁹Ibid., 3.

security realm, the majority of Vietnamese Army units had French officers and indigenous Vietnamese soldiers.²⁰ This structure removed the Vietnamese from decision-making and planning to combat the Vietminh presence. Additionally, it prevented the Vietnamese from developing leaders capable of running the country and the armed forces once the French left.

On the internal security front, differing opinions already existed as to viable solutions to the Vietminh problem. During the visit, the Associated States asked for arms to protect the large rural community from Vietminh attacks designed to pressure farmers and villagers to support the communists.²¹ The military contingent agreed that this model had both positive and negative possible results. In the end, the recommendation contained a note explaining that the military members of the commission did not agree with arming the populace. The recommendation read, “Make available . . . such amounts of non-automatic small arms as are required in selected areas to achieve village defense.”²² The military agreed to increase aid to achieve internal security and to enable the defeat of an invasion through the development of regular armed forces. The US would only provide a maximum of thirty military personnel focused on the technical aspects of creating a Vietnamese military and allowing the French to continue the training mission.²³

Despite the stated need to secure Vietnam, neither the members of the US commission nor the local leaders in Vietnam were optimistic about the outcome. As

²⁰Ibid., 12.

²¹Associated States refers to the French Colony of Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos.

²²Military Group Joint MDAP Survey, Tab A, 6-9.

²³Ibid., Tab A, Part 2, 2-3.

Melby and General Erskine were leaving Vietnam, the acting President of Vietnam, Khac Ve, explained, “There will be peace in Vietnam only after we have secured our independence.”²⁴ Melby reiterated these concerns in his final report:

I am convinced that the basic difficulty arises from the failure in responsible American policy circles to answer and define in detail two basic questions: (1) What is Southeast Asia worth to the United States? (2) What is the United States able and willing within the confines of its over-all commitments and its over-all resources to pay for Southeast Asia?

He elaborated, “Until these questions are answered . . . we can only expect that American activities will be aimless, conflicting, and self defeating.”²⁵ Unfortunately, these questions were not answered as the United States remained engaged on the Korean peninsula and the situation in Indo-China continued to deteriorate.

Ownership

By the spring of 1954, Dwight D. Eisenhower had been president of the United States for just over a year. He achieved an armistice in Korea and watched the situation in Vietnam deteriorate since his inauguration. The end of hostilities in Korea allowed the Chinese Communist Party to support Vietminh efforts in Indo-China. The British were well on their way to success in Malaya, so Vietnam became the new front against communist expansion. President Eisenhower also unveiled his “domino theory” in April

²⁴Telegram from Melby to SECSTATE, Washington, 7 August 1950, Truman Presidential Library, Student Files, Box 31b, Liberty, MO.

²⁵John F. Melby, Final Report on Southeast Asia Trip, December 6, 1950, 2, Truman Presidential Library, Student Files, Box 31b, Liberty, MO.

of 1954.²⁶ This theory described a situation where communism would sweep across the globe toppling one country after another, just like dominoes set up to fall.

The role of the United States in Indo-China changed in May 1954. With the Vietminh's victory over French military forces at Dien Bien Phu and the start of the Geneva Conference, the political situation changed drastically. The French believed that a strong defense of Dien Bien Phu would limit the ability of Vietminh forces to spread through the region. Operationally, the French failed to develop a realistic logistic plan or reinforcement other than through the air. March and April 1954 had been tumultuous months in Washington as leaders debated US options regarding the besieged French troops at Dien Bien Phu.²⁷ The French believed that Eisenhower's decision not to act on the behalf of the French resulted in defeat for the French. Regardless, the French agreed to negotiate the future of Indo-China at the Geneva Conference, a clear signal that their strategy of enforcement through military might alone had failed.

The outcome of the Geneva Conference created the independent countries of Cambodia, Laos, and North and South Vietnam divided at the 17th Parallel. France consolidated its forces in the newly created South Vietnam. Ho Chi Minh seized power in the North, pulling the majority of his communist supporters with him. Ngo Dinh Diem became the Prime Minister of South Vietnam while Emperor Bao Dai continued to reside in France. The situation was less than ideal for the Western powers as they struggled

²⁶David Anderson, *Trapped by Success, The Eisenhower Administration and Vietnam, 1953-1961* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 18.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 30-35.

diplomatically to create a structure that would create independent states free from communist control.

The decision to place Diem in power was controversial. Bao Dai had several possibilities to choose from, but according to David Anderson, Bao Dai understood that the Americans were assuming the mantle of leadership in the region and Diem had a relationship with the Americans.²⁸ Indeed, Diem had friends in America and understood the American mindset. This was not the first time he had been suggested as Prime Minister. Bao Dai had asked him to fill the position in 1949 and Diem had declined due to the tenuous French and Vietnamese relationship. Diem was an ardent nationalist and anti-communist, and he was well known in the leadership circles of Vietnam. After declining Bao Dai's 1949 offer, Diem spent four years abroad including two years in the United States.²⁹

In June 1954, President Eisenhower's Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles spoke to the Los Angeles World Affairs Council about the situation in Vietnam. In his opinion the French had been opposed to "internationalizing the war. They preferred to treat it as a civil war of rebellion."³⁰ He also discussed the complexity of the situation from a western perspective. "The situation in Indo-China is not that of open military aggression by the Chinese Communist Regime. Thus, in Indo-China, the problem is one

²⁸Ibid., 53.

²⁹Phillip Catton, *Diem's Final Failure, Prelude to America's War in Vietnam* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2002), 6.

³⁰John Foster Dulles, Speech to Los Angeles World Affairs Council, 11 June 1954, 3, Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS.

of restoring tranquility in an area where disturbances are fomented from Communist China, but where there is no open invasion by Communist China.”³¹

The Geneva Accords had two additional significant clauses. First, the Accords called for a general election in 1956 to unify Vietnam under a single government. Second, the Accords allowed for a 300-day period of movement for individuals and families to align themselves with their preferred government. These two stipulations set the timetable for the west to come up with a viable plan to ensure the country did not vote itself into a communist government. It also created internal instability as personnel within both sections lived in a refugee status during the political alignment period.

When it was announced that there would be general elections, both sides appeared pleased. The North was happy because it was a foregone conclusion that Ho Chi Minh would beat any candidate from the South in fair elections. The western powers, who found themselves nervous about an election with Ho as the opposition, could not publicly denounce the elections. This was democracy backed by self-determination; the western powers could not stand against it. Diem was aware of the situation. He did not intend to allow the elections to take place.³²

The alignment period was a different story. During this period, over one million people moved into the South while two hundred thousand moved to the North.³³ It spoke well for the future of South Vietnam that so many of people moved south. The problem

³¹Ibid., 4.

³²Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam, A History* (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), 219.

³³Lien-Hang T. Nguyen, *Hanoi's War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 31.

was that the vast majority of these people were Catholic like Diem. These people would form the base of his support, but he never got much more than a base. Additionally, about ten thousand communist revolutionaries remained in the South to continue to press the political message to the population.³⁴ This nucleus would eventually become the central core of the Viet Cong.

Now that the United States was the primary provider of aid to South Vietnam, it scrambled to figure out what to do. Diem was not necessarily the man that Washington wanted in Saigon, but according to Dulles, “we knew of no one better.”³⁵ As the Americans saw it, the situation in Vietnam was grave. America was less than a year into its armistice with North Korea. Leaders in Washington were unsure of the security situation. The French were feeding them information, but there was a certain amount of distrust between the Americans and the French. The Americans were wary, “Dulles now feared a repetition of the Korean Conflict in Southeast Asia, with Communist hordes sweeping southward.”³⁶

Diem was also apprehensive. He was a minority leader in a country that had been ravaged with over a decade of war and unrest. The French led and administered his military and they were due to depart by July 1956. His new American allies were hesitant to commit any additional military forces. He also knew that the French administrators had to leave quickly to show that he was in charge of the country. Diem turned to a man he

³⁴Nguyen, *Hanoi's War*, 31.

³⁵Karnow, *Vietnam*, 214.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 218-219.

had befriended in that past few years to help establish his regime. This man was Wesley R. Fishel, Ph.D.

Diem first met Fishel in Japan in 1950. Fishel worked through his college, Michigan State, to get Diem on the payroll as a consultant in the college's governmental research division. Diem first approached the French about allowing Michigan State to provide assistance in 1952. Now, with Diem in power, Fishel visited Vietnam in August 1954. The visit produced a formal request to allow Michigan State to provide technical assistance to Diem's government. Additionally, this meeting led to the survey mission of four other Michigan State professors in October 1954.³⁷

The team consisted of professors from the Political Science, Economics, and Police Administration Departments as well as the college president's assistant. The professors completed their survey and reported to the college, the United States Operations Mission (USOM), and the leadership in Washington that the college could provide much needed technical assistance to the government of South Vietnam.³⁸

Arthur Brandstatter, the department head of the Police Administration Department at Michigan State, came back to the U.S. with a good idea of how to prioritize and organize the police forces in South Vietnam. His report showed insights into the security situation and culture of South Vietnam. He understood the difference between western police function and the local needs of South Vietnam, specifically the need to maintain

³⁷Robert Scigliano and Guy H. Fox, *Technical Assistance in Vietnam, The Michigan State University Experience* (London: Frederick A Praeger, 1965), 1-2.

³⁸"History of the MSU Police Project," 1960, 1, Michigan State University Archives, Ralph Turner Papers, Box 1694, East Lansing, MI.

open dialogue between the police forces and military.³⁹ He also believed that to be more effective and efficient some major organizational changes were needed. He wanted the various organizations placed under the Ministry of Interior (MOI), who would provide direction to the provincial echelons of the forces. From the provincial level, local units should be allowed “as much local autonomy . . . as existing conditions will permit.”⁴⁰

Brandstatter also realized that due to the ongoing insurgency, complete adherence to western models would not work. “[B]ecause of the dissident elements in the country, an additional bureau should be added that would concern itself primarily with the identification of these elements and collecting information about their activities.”⁴¹ He added, “plans [sh]ould be prepared in advance in an attempt to determine the type and degree of military support available and necessary to assist the local forces in discharging their responsibility.”⁴² The Michigan State survey team returned with an appreciation for the complexity of the situation in South Vietnam and began to ready itself for contract negotiations and eventual commitment of Michigan State personnel for nation building functions in South Vietnam.

³⁹Ibid., 8.

⁴⁰Ibid., 5.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Ibid., 6.

CHAPTER 3

BEGINNING THE GREAT EXPERIMENT

General Collins' Tenure

As the situation in Vietnam deteriorated, President Eisenhower turned to his old friend General J. Lawton Collins to get recommendations on how to restore order in South Vietnam and how to make this fledgling country a viable non-communist state in Southeast Asia. Collins was no stranger to difficult and complex situations. He served in World War II with distinction. He understood how to establish order in turbulent times. More specifically, he had served in Germany following World War I as part of the occupation force.⁴³ His efforts and those of the occupying forces in Germany proved to be fruitful, but Vietnam was no post war Germany.

General Collins was initially notified on October 31, 1954, that he was to become the temporary ambassador to South Vietnam. He learned of this during a conversation at John Foster Dulles' residence, it became official the following day.⁴⁴ Secretary of State Dulles explained to Collins the difficulty of the situation. Dulles did not want President Eisenhower's prestige closely associated with the future of South Vietnam. He believed that Collins' mission would take sixty to ninety days to complete. Dulles was not

⁴³USS Kidd, <http://www.usstkidd.com/collins.html> (accessed April 9, 2014).

⁴⁴Report of Conversation at residence of Mr. John Foster Dulles, Secretary of State, October 31, 1954; Official notification, Department of State communiqué dated November 1, 1954, from Paris to Saigon, Eisenhower Presidential Library, J. Lawton Collins Papers, Box 24, Abilene, KS.

optimistic about the Vietnamese situation. He felt that the one billion dollar yearly price tag placed on South Vietnam was unrealistic, unfeasible, and a waste of funds.⁴⁵

Despite Dulles' pessimism, Collins approached his new assignment with vigor. Knowing he understood very little about South Vietnam and its people, he began receiving briefings on Indo-China the following day. The question immediately arose about what to do with the MSUG and specifically Dr. Fishel. Collins understood that the type of knowledge about Vietnam that Fishel had was essential to swift and productive action in the country. Harold Stassen, director of the Foreign Operations Administration, advised Collins not to place Dr. Fishel on his personal staff. He would be more valuable if he appeared to be one of South Vietnamese President Diem's advisors.⁴⁶ Due partially to this relationship, Collins asked for an extension on the MSUG contract deadline so he could review it. During this briefing, Stassen also advised Collins that he believed Diem lacked the administrative ability and method to run a country.⁴⁷

Meanwhile, Fishel remained active. On November 1, 1954, instead of briefing General Collins, he attended a National Security Council Working Group on Indo-China. Fishel only attended for the first half hour and then departed for security reasons. During his time with the council, he gave a brief synopsis of his trip and meetings with Diem. He told the working group that Diem's eventual goal was the establishment of a republic and that his reaction to the idea of the MSUG was enthusiastic. Following his remarks, all

⁴⁵Conversation at Dulles' house, 2.

⁴⁶Notes from General Collins Indo-China Briefing, November 1, 1954, 2, Eisenhower Presidential Library, J. Lawton Collins Collection, Box 24, Abilene, KS.

⁴⁷Ibid., 3.

group members, except for one, offered suggestions. Unfortunately, the report did not provide any details.⁴⁸

It is not clear if Collins and Fishel ever met, but Collins reviewed the contract outline two days after his official appointment. On November 3, 1954, Collins reviewed the outline. The document was vague and contained no specific details, but it did lay out lines of effort. “The immediate or emergency objective of the program is to make the Vietnam Government effective; the long-range objective is to make the Vietnamese Government and the Institute [of public service] self-sufficient without assistance.”⁴⁹ Everyone involved understood that the immediate problem was the creation of a stable government of South Vietnam, but the larger problem of how to establish and sustain a self-sufficient South Vietnamese Government remained.

The outline listed several priorities, the fourth related to police administration.

Priorities in Police Administration have been assigned on the unquestionable premise that internal security and order are a first essential of good government. They are:

- a) Organization and unification of police forces,
- b) Expansion of training facilities and the improvement of training programs,
- c) Establishment of a modern police communication system, and training of personnel in its efficient use,
- d) Introduction of present day methods of traffic enforcement and engineering,

⁴⁸Memorandum of Meeting-OCB Special Working Group on Indo-China, November 1, 1954, Eisenhower Presidential Library, NSC Staff Papers-OCB Central Files, Box 38, Abilene, KS

⁴⁹FOA Briefing Book on Vietnam for Collins, November 3, 1954, Section- “Proposed outline for a Michigan state University Contract in Public Administration between Michigan State College and Government of Vietnam Summary, and Conclusion by Michigan State College Public Administration Survey Team, October 25, 1954,” Eisenhower Presidential Library, J. Lawton Collins Collection, Box 24, Abilene, KS.

e) Establishment of modern laboratory facilities and training of police specialists in their use.⁵⁰

It was unclear if these priorities were to be accomplished sequentially or simultaneously, but each followed a logical sequence built upon the subsequent objective.

The report acknowledged specific hurdles. For example, “The relationship between the prospective training program in civilian police administration obviously must be carefully coordinated with the military internal security program.”⁵¹ This statement highlighted the blurring of the western distinction between the military’s role and the role of civilian police in Vietnam. In the fall of 1954, Vietnamese military forces, often with French leadership, provided the majority of the government’s internal security. American internal security traditions called for a separation of police and military roles. American military and civilian advisors found the use of military forces in South Vietnam for internal security and stability unpalatable.

Also on November 3, 1954, Stassen sent Collins a letter from the Foreign Operations Administration (FOA) that assessed the status of internal security forces in Vietnam from the United States’ perspective. This document appeared to account for only the uniformed police officers across the country and did not include other organizations South Vietnam relied upon for security. Internal security forces numbered between eight and ten thousand with four thousand in Saigon alone. Few of those were under Diem’s control. Estimates stated that the Binh Xuyen, a tribal, criminal

⁵⁰Ibid., 3.

⁵¹FOA Briefing Book on Vietnam for General Collins, November 3, 1954, section VIb, “Major Problems Relating to the to Michigan State Contract,” Eisenhower Presidential Library, J. Lawton Collins Collection, Box 24, Abilene, KS.

organization, was the real power behind the police with sixty to eighty percent of the force loyal to that organization. During this time of unrest, Diem and his administration wanted to create a para-military organization loyal to him. This organization would be a police-type organization but it would report to the South Vietnamese military at the district level. This construct caused confusion. The separation of Ministry of Interior (MOI) and Ministry of Defense (MOD) roles made it difficult for the United States to define and support the organization. MSUG recommended creating an organization along similar lines, but instead of direct reporting at the district level, suggested a coordination cell that would allow the lines to clearly be drawn between MOI and MOD.⁵²

Clearly, existing South Vietnamese internal security systems were not compatible with US advisors' concept of internal policing. As these lines blurred, the personnel assigned to Vietnam tried to make sense of them. While contract negotiations continued between the United States government, Michigan State University, and Diem's South Vietnamese Government, Ambassador Collins' staff worked to stabilize the situation in South Vietnam. Along with normal issues associated with nation building, the numbers of refugees complicated internal security efforts.

In March and April 1955, Ambassador Collins and Diem faced the realities of the fragile security system in South Vietnam. Previously, the military and law enforcement organizations were aligned tribally. The tribes, or sects, in South Vietnam each provided a unit to the Vietnamese government. Many of these tribes were more loyal to organizations like the Binh Xuyen than to Diem. The Binh Xuyen led a semi-successful

⁵²H. E. Strassen, Letter to General Collins, November 3, 1954, Eisenhower Presidential Library, J. Lawton Collins Collection, Box 24, Abilene, KS.

rebellion against the Diem government based on its attempts to remove the tribal structure from security forces. Ambassador Collins and General John “Iron Mike” O’Daniel, the senior US Military advisor in Vietnam, applied political pressure to many of the tribal leaders. Despite political efforts of the Americans, fighting erupted in Saigon between elements of the Binh Xuyen and South Vietnamese security forces, mainly the Army. When the fighting in Saigon was over, Diem had solidified his position as the leader of South Vietnam but Ambassador Collins’ faith in him had been shaken.⁵³

Despite the events of March and April 1955, contract negotiations were finalized and the Michigan State University contract was signed on April 14, 1955. The contract was valid for two years under Foreign Operations Administration (FOA) oversight. The FOA was the US government agency ultimately responsible for funding MSU’s activities. The contract was not all encompassing. It allowed the South Vietnamese government to designate which police organizations would receive advice and support.⁵⁴ This was significant because it meant the South Vietnamese decided which police organizations would receive the best training and equipment. It would still take time, however, for MSU to get its thirty personnel to Vietnam.

Moreover, the Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) was working on a plan to reorganize the Vietnamese internal security forces in response to the problems they were being asked to solve. A MAAG Colonel completed a study and proposal for

⁵³Spector, *Advice and Support*, 45-249.

⁵⁴“Agreement Between the Government of Vietnam and MSU,” April 14, 1955, 1-15, Michigan State University Archives, Ralph Turner Papers, Box 1693, East Lansing, MI.

the restructuring of the police force.⁵⁵ The report stressed the need to focus the South Vietnamese Army on external security issues rather than internal security. The study concluded that police duties were only supplementing the National Army's internal security efforts. They should have been duplicating them. The report recommended designing a force to face the current problems in South Vietnam, not those found in "stabilized communities."⁵⁶

MAAG's plan called for three categories within South Vietnamese police organization. The first category was the National Services of Police and Sureté. These organizations were to work under the MOI, receive advice from MSUG, and be responsible for administrative and judicial policing outside municipalities. The second category was Prefectural and Municipal Police. These organizations were the same as the National Services but focused on larger urban area such as Saigon and Hue.

MAAG's third force was the Civil Guard. This force would work outside the MOI. Their purpose was to expose and suppress the Vietminh's covert and clandestine political activities. MAAG understood that American police organizations would not be familiar with these types of activities and thus recommended Thai and Filipino advisors for training.⁵⁷ Additionally, he envisioned a hybrid military and police element. When the

⁵⁵The actual date of completion of this report is unknown. It was mentioned in Ambassador Collins' daily meeting notes April 19, 1955. The study itself was not dated but it was assumed to be the same study. Ambassador Collins wanted to take the report to Washington for unknown purposes. Colonel Dawn is referenced as the author of the study; his first name is not in the reference.

⁵⁶"Revised Police Study," Colonel Dawn, spring 1955, 1, Eisenhower Presidential Library, Armed Forces Collection, Box 26, Abilene, KS.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 2.

study was written, Diem had only recently formed the Civil Guard under a headquarters in Saigon. Diem formed these units quickly and they were only equipped with rifles. Their mission was to subdue organizations such as the Binh Xuyen. MAAG surmised that they needed to be armed more like light infantry with carbines, sub-machine guns, pistols, revolvers, and grenades. He thought former military personnel would be a good fit for the organization. As such, MAAG believed they should be organized into a military structure. That structure would place brigade command at the regional level, battalion command at the provincial level, and company commands inside provinces with both static and mobile units. This structure would allow them to “develop familiarity with the populace and the security problems of its respective area.”⁵⁸ MAAG did not mention MSUG in the study, but its understanding and depiction of the precarious internal situation in South Vietnam was accurate.

The First Six Months

The lead MSUG elements arrived on May 20, 1955. South Vietnam was still fragile, but Diem and his supporters had consolidated the security forces. French military influence waned and the Vietnamese were largely loyal to the American Government money trail. Ambassador Collins’ sixty to ninety days had lapsed by May of 1955. The new focus of the United States’ efforts was the Vietnamese presidential election that was supposed to take place in the summer of 1956. MSUG advisors arrived in country throughout the summer and they found themselves in a tumultuous environment.

⁵⁸“History of the MSU Police Project,” 73-74.

On May 27, 1955, the vanguard of the MSUG police team, consisting of Howard Hoyt and Richard Rogers, arrived in Saigon. The entire team would not arrive until October 1955, but work finally began in earnest.⁵⁹ As the MSUG team arrived, they reviewed MAAG's proposal for police organization and began conducting their own inspections. Their initial reactions were positive, especially related to MAAG's idea to separate municipal and rural police functions.⁶⁰ This suggestion resonated with their own paradigms associated with proper police organization and jurisdictional constructs.

MAAG's ideas about the Civil Guard were a different matter. The advisors did not like the idea because it was "contrary to good police work." They did not explain why, only that it was. When they visited the Civil Guard training facility they concluded, "It was obvious at this time that the Civil Guard is strongly military, and it will be a major problem to change them over to a police organization."⁶¹ In the eyes of the MSUG advisors, South Vietnam needed more police, not military. If acted upon, the ideas expressed in the MAAG study in regards to the Civil Guard, would only further convolute the separation between internal and external security forces.

The remainder of the team arrived during the summer and fall of 1955. Gilbert Shelby arrived on July 30, 1955. Corey Dymond, who was the identity card specialist, arrived August 6. Charles Sloane followed him on September 3. Royce Williams, dual hatted as the communications specialist and traffic engineer, arrived on the 29th of that month. In October, Joseph Marlow arrived on the third; and Jack Ryan finalized the

⁵⁹Ibid., 64.

⁶⁰"History of the MSU Police Project," 70-76

⁶¹Ibid., 77-79.

police-advising portion of the MSUG team on the thirty-first. The advising and policing challenge awaited these men as they arrived in Saigon.⁶²

Prior to leaving office, Ambassador Collins established a Police Study Commission. Hoyt and Rogers joined this study alongside representatives from the embassy, MAAG, USOM, and other agencies. These agencies appeared to use the MAAG report as a template for the internal security agencies in South Vietnam. The report cautioned that the organizations “should be capable of ensuring law and order and of cooperating with the armed forces in maintaining internal security against Viet-Minh and anti-government elements.”⁶³ This was the guiding concept.

Once the MSUG advisors had an idea of what they wanted the South Vietnamese internal security forces to look like, they had to determine what they were starting with. In December 1955, they published their initial report on the types and status of internal security forces in South Vietnam. This fifty-one page report detailed the function, background, organization, personnel, equipment and training of five security organizations. These organizations were the Civil Guard, municipal police in Saigon-Cholon, security police, Gendarmerie, and rural police groups. These organizations all fell under the MOI but each had its own director.

The Civil Guard had been recently organized into one coherent command. In April 1955, President Diem organized it under a Director General, which later became a cabinet position. The Civil Guard’s primary role was security outside the municipalities. The Civil Guard’s duties included assistance in pacification, guarding public assets, such

⁶²See org Chart in Appendix B.

⁶³“History of the MSU Police Project,” 70-76.

as seaports and airports, not guarded by the military, and support during national disasters. The Civil Guard had forty-four thousand members, but they were poorly equipped. Civil Guard units had a mix of small arms from revolvers to automatic rifles and access to two thousand grenade launchers in central storage. Civil Guard weapons were either purchased locally, donated by the French, or they were on loan from the Vietnamese Army. MSUG estimated that the Civil Guard needed over twelve hundred vehicles to accomplish their mission, but only thirty-four existed. Uniforms were also problematic. Only a quarter of the force had proper uniforms.⁶⁴

The Civil Guard's most significant issue was training. The leadership consisted of mostly political appointees who may have had military experience but generally did not have law enforcement experience. Diem may have viewed the force as a para-military organization more than a police force, but he was playing a numbers game with the South Vietnamese Army capped at one hundred and fifty thousand.⁶⁵ Civil Guard members were no better trained than their leadership. Many were veterans of tribal security forces that may have had some French military training, but they had not received any law enforcement training. Training individual Civil Guardsmen on law enforcement was challenging because many of them were illiterate.⁶⁶

⁶⁴Ralph H. Smuckler, "Report on the Police of Viet Nam," December 1, 1955, 1-22, Texas Tech Vietnam Archive, Lubbock, TX.

⁶⁵Diem inherited an army of 250,000 from the French. MAAG immediately began downsizing to 150,000. Herring, *America's Longest War, The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975*, 56-57.

⁶⁶Smuckler, "Report of Police in Vietnam," 22.

Within the first six months of its existence, the MSUG team highlighted the desperate state of the Civil Guard. Despite the desire to de-militarize the Civil Guard, the military was the easiest place to look for training support. The other institutions in South Vietnam were not nearly as functional and it would not have been cost effective to send so many individuals to foreign training centers. Rogers established a training site at a military facility, the Quang Trung Training Camp. Despite only being in country for a little more than a month, its first course began on September 5, 1955. The course accommodated up to five hundred guardsmen each week and it ran for six weeks. The trainees spent four weeks being trained by the Vietnamese Army and two weeks under Civil Guard Officers who learned their trade in the Philippines. The military portion of the training focused on marksmanship and familiarization with the heavier weapons. The military also taught the Civil Guard basic small unit patrolling techniques for jungle areas. The police portion of the training was a familiarization with the rule of law. Up to three thousand officers were in training at any given time.⁶⁷

President Diem, however, was not happy with the Civil Guard. In a meeting with the advisors on September 30, he stated that neither he nor the population trusted the Civil Guard.⁶⁸ Diem, however, understood the need to project government influence into the rural areas. In 1955, South Vietnam had a population of 13.6 million, less than twenty-five percent lived in urban areas.⁶⁹ He wanted a squad of ten Civil Guards for

⁶⁷“History of the MSU Police Project,” 90-92

⁶⁸*Ibid.*, 106.

⁶⁹Institute of Economic Research, Hitotsubashi University, “Total population of South Vietnam,” <http://www.ier.hit-u.ac.jp/COE/Japanese/discussionpapers/DP98.7/1.htm> (accessed May 9, 2014); December 1955 “Report on Police” by MSUG

each of the six thousand villages in the South Vietnamese countryside, which would have amounted to sixty thousand Civil Guardsmen. Diem wanted more Civil Guardsmen than the current training program could produce. He even expressed ideas of going to the old system of Army-trained village guards. Diem ended the meeting abruptly, which prevented him from further explaining his intent.⁷⁰

The second largest organization that MSUG focused on was the Prefectural Police of Saigon-Cholon. The Prefectural Police were essentially urban police. They had a headquarters under a director who had seven commissariats to handle the day-to-day business of running the organization. There were five thousand police in Saigon-Cholon, which represented a 1 to 4,000 ratio with the population. Of those 5,000 policemen, 2170 were day-to-day employees who did the majority of patrolling in the city despite their temporary status. These recruits were of a slightly higher quality than the Civil Guard due to the literacy requirement. Like the Civil Guard, ex-military were preferred for this work, but little training was provided. The Saigon-Cholon police also had more than twice the amount of motor vehicles than the Civil Guard and at least one firearm for each member of the force.⁷¹

The MSUG team also began to work on a formal training academy for the Prefectural Police. They determined the need to separate the Civil Guard training from other types of police due to the different missions they were to perform. Gilbert Shelby

puts the population of Saigon-Cholon at approximately two million. Percentage based off three million in urban areas.

⁷⁰“History of the MSU Police Project,” 106-109.

⁷¹“Report on Police,” 23-35.

led this effort. He used an old school outside Saigon as the training school. In this school, he could train 120 police officers at any given time. The training consisted of 221 total hours of training, approximately six weeks at forty hours per week. The two largest training blocks were forty-eight hours of military training and forty hours of criminal investigation. These two tasks along with self-defense accounted for half of the training hours at the school. Once the school opened on November 8, 1955, Charles Sloane stayed to administer it and Shelby turned his focus to Saigon-Cholon Police operations.⁷²

The next internal security organization in South Vietnam was the Sureté. The French used this organization to investigate political entities, political personnel, and subversive movements and acts. This MOI organization fell under the director of police. They shared an administrative headquarters with the prefectural police, but not much else. If the prefectural police and civil guard were the arms and legs of the police organization, the Sureté was the brain. Only about 400 personnel were active in the Sureté at any given time.

In MSUG's initial understanding of the police forces, the Sureté was compared to the Federal Bureau of Investigation and would later be called the Vietnamese Bureau of Investigation as well as Sureté. This organization was more of an intelligence branch of the internal security forces and thus the MSUG advisors gave it a great deal of attention. In addition to regular police work, MSUG trained these officers in modern finger print techniques, identification procedures, and advanced investigative techniques.

⁷²“History of the MSU Police Project,” 92-97.

Additionally, the Sureté vetted security clearances for Vietnamese Government personnel.⁷³

The final formal piece to the internal security structure in South Vietnam was the Gendarmerie. This group was a hybrid of military and local police that liaised with both parties. Upon initial inspection, it appeared to the MSUG advisors that the primary role was traffic accident reporting in rural areas, but they soon noticed that the majority of these accidents involved military vehicles. The Gendarmerie operated in urban areas when military vehicles were involved in accidents. The advisors also noticed that the Gendarmerie conducted investigations of military personnel involved with political affairs. This group fell under the MOD rather than the MOI and only consisted of 753 men in 1955.

The Gendarmerie possessed South Vietnam's most highly trained internal security officers. They all received military training prior to entering a six-month police training course. The organization itself wanted to expand to eventually place 150 officers in each province while the MSUG team recommended disbanding the organization. They saw an organization full of highly trained personnel not being used to its potential.⁷⁴ Throughout MSUG's time in South Vietnam, they never fully understood the role of the Gendarmerie. From reading reports filed about the actions of the Gendarmerie, they appeared to be more of a secret police force that was mostly concerned with protecting the Diem administration from internal threats.

⁷³“Report on Police,” 36-43.

⁷⁴Ibid., 44-48.

The final piece of the South Vietnamese internal security puzzle was the rural police groups. They consisted of village militia and village cooperative guards. There was no central headquarters or agency responsible for these groups. Rather they were reminiscent of a time in Vietnam when the tribes and sects looked after their own security and did not concern themselves with the central government.⁷⁵ This, of course, meant that they were not loyal to the Diem government unless the local leader was. Diem stated several times that he wanted a militia loyal to him, but the Americans who were paying for the arms and training did not accede to his desires.⁷⁶

These organizations were unlike anything the MSUG advisors had dealt with before. Most of the advisors were employees of the university who taught some form of criminology at Michigan State or who were colleagues of the professors. They were western law enforcement professionals who understood western law enforcement well. MSUG operated in a foreign culture struggling with its future as they to discern the way ahead.

Proposed Reorganization

Despite the victories made in the fall of 1955 that allowed the MSUG team to send quantifiable data in the form of numbers of trained Vietnamese security officers back to the United States to justify the money spent, there were other issues as well. In an August 1955 report on Vietnam, the prospect of using any of the policing units in South Vietnam to achieve security and stability was bleak. “Until such time as the national and

⁷⁵Ibid., 49-51.

⁷⁶“History of the MSU Police Project,” 107.

local police forces can be constituted, principal reliance must be placed on the Vietnamese Army to maintain internal security.”⁷⁷ This was further complicated by deficiencies in the MSUG’s current efforts.

The present US Program of assistance appears to be deficient in that it does not specifically embrace all elements of the police and does not emphasize sufficiently the counter-intelligence and counter-subversive role or training at the lower levels. Accordingly it is recommended that the police program be expanded so that the US will assist in the reorganization and training of the National Police, Sureté, the municipal police, and the Civil Guard.⁷⁸

The MSUG advisors had rectified some of these issues by December 1955. Further, they had evaluated the various South Vietnamese security organizations and their capabilities. They were in the process of establishing sustainable training methods for the security forces. The issue they did not address was the need for counter-intelligence and counter-subversive groups and training. This may have been a result of the skill sets involved. Police officers in the United States in the first half of the twentieth century were not concerned with those types of problems and thus had no frame of reference to begin to work that problem set. The evidence suggests that the MSUG advisors viewed the insurgency as a problem for MAAG, while MAAG thought the police forces MSUG was training should deal with the problem.

Despite that particular shortcoming, the MSUG team did develop a proposal for the organization of the South Vietnamese law enforcement agencies. In the preface of the document, the authors admitted to viewing the problem from an American perspective, “Understandably, the thinking embodied in the report largely reflects the experience of

⁷⁷“Vietnam,” August 22, 1955, Eisenhower Presidential Library, OCB Central Files, Box 38, Abilene, KS.

⁷⁸*Ibid.*, 18.

American law enforcement. However, the drafters of the report have endeavored to provide recommendations which fit conditions currently existing within the Republic of Viet Nam.”⁷⁹ The report had six major recommendations. Undoubtedly, the advisory team had seen President Diem move personnel so often and so fast that there was a major concern of the higher echelons of security as well as the lower levels.⁸⁰ By this time, Diem had already gone through three different MOI directors.

The first recommendation called for the creation of a National Security Affairs Council to cross talk among the various ministries and to advise the President on internal security matters. The second called for an assistant to the Interior Secretary who would coordinate the activities of all the civil law enforcement agencies of Vietnam to ensure coordination and efficient chains of command. The third recommendation was for the Civil Guard to remain under the control of the Interior Secretary except during invasion or extreme emergency. The fourth and fifth recommendations addressed Diem’s insistence on handpicking the officers who served as the directors and deputy directors of the individual agencies. The Secretary of Interior and the individual directors should appoint subordinates in order to build quality teams in the government structure. The

⁷⁹Howard W. Hoyt, “Report on the Proposed Organization of the Law Enforcement Agencies of the Republic of Viet-nam,” Saigon, Vietnam April 1956, iii, Michigan State University Archives, Wesley Fishel Papers, East Lansing, MI.

⁸⁰In August 1955, several senior Civil Defense officials visited and liked the Malayan Jungle Fighting School. Two weeks after the visit, key individuals were transferred out of the Civil Guard before change could be implemented. “History of the MSU Police Project,” 140.

final recommendation was to remove civil authority from the provincial chiefs appointed by Diem and place it under the officials of the individual organizations.⁸¹

These six elements addressed a list of nineteen problems. Many of these centered on the lack of clearly defined chains of command and subordination of the law enforcement agencies to the military.⁸² During Diem's tenure, it was common for military officers to occupy leadership positions in law enforcement agencies, especially the Civil Guard, only to be returned to the military just as they began to make the organization better.⁸³

During the first year of the contract between South Vietnam and MSU, the Civil Guard was problematic. MSUG was only to supply training and support to the organizations that fell under the MOI. The MAAG would provide training and support for the MOD organizations. This line was continually blurred in regards to the Civil Guard. In November 1955, President Diem moved the individual Civil Guard units under the command of the MOD, but MOI continued to administer them.⁸⁴ This step allowed the Civil Guard to be under the competent and steady umbrella of leadership that the MOD provided, while still receiving training, supplies, and monetary support through the FOA for internal security. Hoyt and Ryan learned about this particular move after it was

⁸¹Hoyt, "Report on the Proposed Organization of the Law Enforcement Agencies of the Republic of Viet-nam," iv-v.

⁸²See Appendix C.

⁸³The movement of officers between the military and police often confused the lines of responsibility as individuals did what they knew best. The best personnel were always pulled back into the military. "History of the MSU Police Project," 139.

⁸⁴*Ibid.*, 114-115.

made. They disagreed with the action and argued that this would not solve problems; it would only further confuse the system. They understood that the Civil Guard was the “foundation for the present and future internal security of Vietnam.”⁸⁵ Further complicating the system was the fact that the province chiefs paid the Civil Guardsmen. After a suggestion to centralize the disbursement of funds through a central national agency, Diem made the change in January 1956, but it took months before the change went in to effect.⁸⁶

Additionally, in November 1955, Diem spoke to Hoyt and Ryan about the idea of turning the Civil Guard into something similar to the Philippine Constabulary.⁸⁷ He wanted an organization that worked directly for him and acted as his eyes and ears. This was a critical suggestion. It indicated that Diem wanted to centralize all information and power under his control. He realized that most of the problems in the countryside were handled at lower levels but he wanted more oversight. MSUG tried to steer him towards allowing the Civil Guard to be a police organization for the rural areas.⁸⁸

Despite MSUG’s shaky first year, it was successful in many ways. In November 1955, Diem won the presidential elections.⁸⁹ In March 1956, South Vietnam elected its

⁸⁵Ibid., 115.

⁸⁶Ibid., 137.

⁸⁷The Philippine Constabulary was a law enforcement agency that consisted of military members trained in law enforcement. These military men then conducted civil police actions across the country in lieu of a professional civil police force.

⁸⁸“History of the MSU Police Project,” 110-111.

⁸⁹The results of this election are a point of controversy. It is largely believed that Diem and his supporters fixed the outcome of the election.

first General Assembly. MSUG later noted that everyone in the General Assembly belonged to Diem's party. They stated, "He [Diem] had no tolerance for anyone disagreeing with him or his policies." They also noted that the Secretary of the Interior at this time, Bui Van Thinh, was sent to Japan as the ambassador after disagreeing with Diem and speaking out about it.⁹⁰

Despite Diem's heavy-handed approach regarding upper echelon personnel management in the police units, progress was made throughout 1956. In the summer bi-annual report on the overall program, the police program was represented well. Hoyt boasted, "One of the major sources of satisfaction during the past six months has been the steady progress made by the police forces of Vietnam."⁹¹ The police division was making progress. The report noted several success indicators. These focused on numbers of officers trained, facilities opened, and leaders advised. There was no mention of field police work at all. Training was a good thing, but there were no metrics to establish if the training programs were successful at creating a more secure Vietnam. The MSUG advisors could not validate their programs in any facet other than sheer numbers of Vietnamese trained.

Immediately following the summer assessment, the police division published another report that proposed the reorganization of the Vietnamese Bureau of Investigation (VBI). Published in July 1956, this document was as long as the previous recommendation and was for an organization that only accounted for 400 security

⁹⁰Ibid., 149-150.

⁹¹Wesley Fishel, "Third Report of the MSU Vietnam Advisory Team," June 30, 1956, 5, Texas Tech Vietnam Archive, Lubbock, TX.

personnel. Also of note, in less than a year, US advisors had removed the French term Sureté from their vocabulary and Americanized this organization's name. Despite the VBI's limited size and reach, the MSUG advisors believed improvement of this organization would "undoubtedly greatly contribute to the internal security and well being of this country."⁹² Of interest was the amount of effort that went in to this document. At thirty-seven pages, it was double the length of the previous reorganization documents and provided a great deal more detail than the previous one. This revealed the level of comfort the advisors had with this organization. The MSUG advisors were seasoned investigators who were biased by their experience. Despite earlier claims that the Civil Guard was the key to internal security, it appears that the majority of intellectual thinking went towards the VBI.

Another key event that happened in the summer of 1956 was an increase in personnel. An amendment to the contract allowed the number of advisors to grow from thirty to fifty-four.⁹³ The increase of twenty-four advisors was spread across the entire team. For the police division this meant they would eventually climb to twenty-six personnel by the end of 1957 from eight in the summer of 1956.⁹⁴ These changes took

⁹²“Preliminary Report on the Proposed Re-Organization of the Vietnamese Bureau of Investigation,” Saigon, Vietnam July 1956, preface, Michigan State University, Wesley Fishel Papers, East Lansing, MI.

⁹³“Amendment to Contract,” June 15, 1956, Michigan State University Archives, Ralph Turner Papers, East Lansing, MI.

⁹⁴Numbers are based on organization charts in the back of the 4th MSU report and the 6th MSU report obtained from the Texas Tech Vietnam Archive. The 5th MSU report could not be located for analysis. See Appendix D.

time to implement and President Diem, who was beginning to exercise his power more frequently, was not patient.

By the fall of 1956, the South Vietnamese had not made any efforts to reorganize their internal security structure to accommodate MSUG's recommendations.⁹⁵ As of October 24, 1956, Diem's regime seemed to be doing the opposite of what MSUG proposed. Instead of disbanding the Gendarmerie, it had almost doubled in size from 700 to 1300 officers. No decisions had been made on the creation of a central crime lab or identification division. Perhaps most disheartening to the MSUG advisors, all local and national police still received operational orders from the provincial chiefs rather than the central authorities in Saigon. In sum, MSUG felt that "instead of progressing in terms of reorganization, the Vietnamese Government is going in reverse."⁹⁶

These sentiments emerged in a meeting on December 4, 1956. The meeting included Ambassador G. Frederick Reinhardt, General Williams, Dr. Fishel, and other members of the military and the MSUG team. This meeting revealed that while the American agencies were all working towards similar ends, the South Vietnamese were not. General Williams commented that he too thought the Gendarmerie was a pointless organization and needed to be eliminated. Ambassador Reinhardt observed, "That the Police Advisory Team is being blocked from making its fullest contribution by officials in the top levels of the Vietnamese Government." On the other hand, he noted "that the

⁹⁵Wesley Fishel, "Fourth Report of the MSU Vietnam Advisory Team," December 31, 1956, 3, Texas Tech Vietnam Archive, Lubbock, TX.

⁹⁶"History of the MSU Police Project," 146.

MSU Police Advisory Team is making progress at the lower levels of the various police echelons.”⁹⁷

The Ambassador’s thoughts are clearly reflected in these bi-annual status reports. They continually referenced the numbers of policemen trained in basic tasks for entry-level positions or for new equipment provided to the Vietnamese. There was some discussion of leadership seminars provided by MSUG advisors directly to the leadership of the internal security forces. But Diem’s constant shuffling of personnel and the blending of military and police leadership was frustrating and often prevented lasting effects. In one noteworthy example, General Nguyen Ngoc Le was promoted and moved from the VBI back to the Army on December 16, 1956. When he left, he took a large portion of this staff back to the Army and Diem replaced him with Colonel Phan Xuan Chieu, another Army officer.⁹⁸

The security forces began to receive vehicles to assist with national lines of communication. The MAAG provided 353 vehicles from the Lisbon Program and .38 caliber revolvers began arriving in country for the security forces. The revolvers came from the US and only required user training prior to distribution to the force. The vehicles were a different story. The majority were not operational and were thus in need of a great deal of maintenance before they could be utilized.⁹⁹ Most of these vehicles went to the Civil Guard, but small portions were distributed throughout the police forces.

⁹⁷“History of the MSU Police Project,” 146.

⁹⁸Wesley Fishel, “Fourth Report of the MSU Vietnam Advisory Team,” 5.

⁹⁹Ibid.

Training also continued for the entry-level personnel at sustained rates. In November 1955, MSUG had established a police academy outside Saigon. By December 1956, 926 Saigon police officers graduated from that police academy. Likewise, Civil Guard personnel continually graduated from their training course at Quang-Trung, 15,000 by the end of 1956. Training programs had expanded in the past year to include maintenance programs for vehicles, weapons, and radios.¹⁰⁰ The MSUG advisors stressed impressive statistics but were still frustrated with the overall status of internal-security forces.

Howard Hoyt wrote a letter November 17, 1956, that captured much of MSUG's frustration. He and Fishel were present at a meeting with Diem discussing the new Director General of the Civil Guard. Diem expressed his frustration with the new director and his efforts to centralize command and control of the Civil Guard. Diem wanted the province chiefs to control the Civil Guard units because he held them personally responsible for the security of their provinces. Diem would accept the fact that this was an inefficient system. Hoyt emphasized that by making the provincial chiefs responsible for the security forces, Diem would maintain control of the security forces.¹⁰¹ This also meant that if any single province attempted to usurp Diem's centralized control, other provinces, along with the Army, could be used to resolve the issue.

The years 1955 and 1956 were exciting for the MSUG advisors. Everything in the country was new and different. It had been easy to achieve small victories with training and equipment, but the need for a coherent plan was becoming more apparent. The only

¹⁰⁰Ibid., 5-7.

¹⁰¹"History of the MSU Police Project," 142-145.

original objective achieved was the expansion of training facilities and programs. The group attempted to reorganize the Vietnamese Police structure, but to no avail. The plodding and resistant Vietnamese bureaucracy was beginning to wear on the advisory team's patience. With 1957 came contract renewals and a deeper understanding of the resistance that inhibited American notions of progress. At the center of the issue was the purpose and use of the Civil Guard. As the MSUG team tried to define the mission of this element, it became more frustrated because of Vietnamese resistance to change and the tensions between MSUG and MAAG that exasperated their working relationships.

CHAPTER 4

A SYSTEM FRACTURING

In the spring of 1957, the MSUG advisors began to view their training efforts from a different perspective. During the first eighteen months, the advisors focused on short-term fixes that produced immediate results. They realized the need to develop a long-term strategy to wean the South Vietnamese security institutions from their reliance on American support and guidance. Significant initiatives included translating classes and manuals into Vietnamese to detach Americans completely from the training programs. Equipment arrived in country regularly and the effects of maintenance programs were being seen. Despite all of this, the security situation in South Vietnam was not getting markedly better and no major reorganization had taken place.

Despite the need for a comprehensive police strategy, the MAAG strategy was aimed at external threats. MAAG was most concerned with a North Vietnamese invasion backed by China.¹⁰² The need for Army units to assist with internal security hampered this shift. By March 1957, the Civil Guard was responsible for the rural security operations in eleven of twenty provinces in southern Vietnam and a plan was in place to assume the other nine by July.¹⁰³ A few months later, they were responsible for twenty-

¹⁰²Spector, *Advice and Support, The Early Years*, 320.

¹⁰³Hutchinson and Palmer, "Report on the Mutual Security Program in Vietnam," April 1957, 4, Eisenhower Presidential Library, NSC Staff Paper-OCB Central Files, Box 40, Abilene, KS.

five of thirty-six provinces in the entire country.¹⁰⁴ The Civil Guard had grown to a sizeable force of 259 company-sized elements spread throughout South Vietnam. The size of the Civil Guard was somewhere between fifty and sixty thousand and the amount of armaments increased as well. By May 1957, each Civil Guard Company had at least one machine gun and one 60mm mortar system along with an ever-increasing amount of modern submachine guns and carbines.¹⁰⁵ Despite MSUG's insistence on making them a police organization, the mortars and machine guns were necessary to react to "potential guerilla activity in force and because of terrain features in Vietnam."¹⁰⁶

The Civil Guard was also becoming a better-trained force due to the effects of the MSUG training courses. By June, MSUG had trained nineteen thousand guardsmen and two thousand officers and noncommissioned officers.¹⁰⁷ They also received a fresh advisor from the US; Rogers completed his contract in March and returned home. Verne Daegen arrived in May to assume the mantle; he entered an increasingly difficult situation.

The May 1957 "Civil Police Administration Program Report" attempted to clarify the duties of the Civil Guard. The document outlined four missions of the Civil Guard and six functions. The four missions were:

¹⁰⁴Wesley Fishel and Howard Hoyt, "Civil Police Administration Program," Saigon, Vietnam, May 1, 1957, 15, Michigan State University Archives, Ralph Turner Papers, Box 19, East Lansing, MI.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., 26-27.

¹⁰⁶Ibid., 58.

¹⁰⁷"History of the MSU Police Project," 156.

- a) to establish and maintain the peace and security of the Republic of Vietnam,
- b) to assist in the pacification of portions of the country by replacing the military in recently occupied and pacified zones,
- c) to serve as the internal security force, relieving the military for its basic responsibilities, and
- d) to serve as the eyes and ears for information regarding subversive activities to be reported to the responsible agency, assumed to be the VBI.¹⁰⁸

These missions were not very different from those proposed in the spring of 1956, but the Civil Guard made no headway in ensuring internal security.

To execute these missions, the Civil Guard was to perform six functions. First, they were to serve as civil police in all of Vietnam, except cities with established police departments, such as Saigon and Hue. Next, they were to have full police powers and enforce all laws and administrative rules. Third, they would become responsible for the control of traffic, accident investigation, and enforcement of traffic laws and regulations. The fourth function made them responsible for guarding national public buildings, convoys, communications, and transportations facilities. Additionally, they were to perform special guard duty at seaports and airports. The final proposal made the Civil Guard responsible for protecting the eight hundred and twenty miles of border with Cambodia and Laos.¹⁰⁹

The border protection mission was the only new requirement. In 1954 and 1955, refugees crossed borders freely to seek a home in one of the four new countries established at the Geneva Conference. Two years later, the flow of refugees had slowed and normal international borders were established. Previously, no border enforcement agency was needed since all were part of French Indo-China, but with national

¹⁰⁸Fishel and Hoyt, "Civil Police Administration Program," 15-16.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., 16.

demarcation, the South Vietnamese needed a new force to secure its new borders.

Interestingly, the seventeenth parallel was not one of the borders assigned to the Civil Guard. That was due to the perceived threat from North Vietnam and China and the need for the South Vietnamese Army to protect that area.

The “Civil Police Administration Program” described all of these missions and functions. It outlined the nature of the various police agencies and gave a plan for the future of these organizations. Although there were very few changes from the mission and functions of the Civil Guard, some other changes reflected how the American’s viewed the Civil Guard. The “Civil Police Administration Program” described the Civil Guard as a combination of state police, county sheriff’s department, and the National Guard.¹¹⁰ This description reflected the variety of training efforts that combined military and police functions. The mixture was not reflected in the assigned tasks though. The Civil Guard’s assigned tasks did not reflect the composition of their training. The missions were all related to traditional policing requirements and there was no mention of the Civil Guard acting as a reserve force for the Army, which was a typical task for the US National Guard in the 1950s.

Additionally, the program called for the Civil Guard to downsize over the next three years from fifty-four thousand to thirty thousand. It would have been a monumental task for a force that size to police six thousand small villages, all of South Vietnam’s seaports and airports, and over eight hundred miles of Cambodian and Laotian border areas. The MSUG advisors suggested the force reduction due to the perceived decrease in

¹¹⁰Ibid., 3.

violence in the country.¹¹¹ With a perceived safer internal environment, the advisors wanted to de-militarize the police forces and they began with the Civil Guard.

The Civil Guard was now at the epicenter of the police advising issues. The VBI and city police programs progressed according to the vision of all parties involved. The Civil Guard, on the other hand, had been in a seesaw battle between the MOD and MOI since the MSUG advisors arrived and now the issue was coming to a head. In July 1957, Ambassador Reinhardt ordered all aid to the Civil Guard stopped until “a clearly defined concept of the duties and function of the Civil Guard be issued by Vietnamese Government officials.”¹¹² From the US government’s view, the Civil Guard was becoming a second Army at a cost of three million dollars a year in addition to the thirty-five million dollars going to the South Vietnamese Army.¹¹³

Funding for the Civil Guard ceased through the fall of 1958. The South Vietnamese finally submitted a document titled “Organization of the Civil Guard” on November 2, 1958. Five days later, Fishel wrote a letter to Hoyt stating that the government of Vietnam had not laid out a clear future for the Civil Guard. He recommended that the United States continue its ban on funding for the Civil Guard until the South Vietnamese produced an adequate plan.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹Ralph Turner, Letter to Arthur Brandstatter, Director School of Police Administration, January 24, 1961, 3, Michigan State University Archive, Ralph Turner Papers, Box 1694, East Lansing, MI.

¹¹²“History of the MSU Police Project,” 157.

¹¹³Ibid.

¹¹⁴Ibid., 158-159.

From the South Vietnamese perspective, the role of the Civil Guard was purely a US Government issue. The US Government had limited the South Vietnamese Army to one hundred fifty thousand personnel because of its nuclear umbrella. The US thought the nuclear deterrent would prevent Diem from getting any ideas that could lead to a large-scale, nuclear war with the Peoples Republic of China and the United Soviet Socialist Republics. Funding also constrained the US commitment to a larger military force. USOM, the funding source for MSUG, would not fund the Civil Guard if it were a MOD organization.¹¹⁵

This logic was not universally accepted. The MAAG commander, General Williams, believed the Civil Guard should fall under the MOD and the MAAG should provide the training. In a conversation between Diem and Williams in December 1958, Diem stated, “This is not Brazil, Argentina, France, or Michigan. . . . They [MSUG advisors] do not know the country or the language and are at the mercy of their interpreters.”¹¹⁶ Williams agreed. MSUG advisors were “police types who didn’t see the big picture.” In reality, neither American group understood the big picture as Williams focused on a large-scale conventional military invasion from the North and the MSUG advisers continued to work towards a western security model in the midst of a growing Viet Cong presence.¹¹⁷

Either this lack of consistency from US advisors confused Diem and his supporters or it allowed them to act as though they were indifferent. In November 1957,

¹¹⁵Spector, *Advice and Support: The Early Years*, 325.

¹¹⁶*Ibid.*, 322.

¹¹⁷*Ibid.*, 322-324.

the team received a letter from the MOI stating that it made no difference to the administration where the aid money came from as long as it came. The MOI further stated, “. . . in the mind of the president, the Civil Guard was to constitute neither a civilian nor a military police organization.”¹¹⁸ This letter made the team question how serious the South Vietnamese were about police reform.¹¹⁹ Diem often reiterated his vision for the Civil Guard as a hybrid force. He wanted the Civil Guard to act as rear area security in a conventional war with North Vietnam. To do this he wanted the key leaders to be military officers with an additional year of civil police training. He wanted MOD to control them, but their funding would come from MOI sources.¹²⁰ In many ways, Diem was playing the US State Department off against the Department of Defense regarding the Civil Guard. In hindsight, he would have been better served getting the best force he could in the short term and then converting it later.

Despite the withholding of funds for six months, the Civil Guard was still functioning and receiving some training. The funds being withheld were earmarked for new equipment. The controversy in the last few months of 1957, however, may have caused the Americans to re-evaluate their programs and their view of the Civil Guard. In February 1958, MAAG and MSUG began to collaborate on the training each provided for the Civil Guard. There had always been some level of military training in the program, but now MAAG officers paid more attention to what the training entailed. The Civil Guard also received a new Director General, Colonel Le-Khuong. The appointment of

¹¹⁸“History of the MSU Police Program,” 159.

¹¹⁹Ibid.

¹²⁰Spector, *Advice and Support: The Early Years*, 322.

Colonel Le gave the MSUG advisors the impression of a definitive change of direction for the future culture of the Civil Guard.¹²¹

Despite this optimism in February, the semi-annual report published that summer did not provide any encouragement for the Civil Guard's future. In the two paragraphs focused on the Civil Guard, the question over the organization's future was still in question despite the transfer of command authority from the President to the Secretary of the State for the Interior (MOI). Though this was a positive sign, advisors had seen this scenario many times before so it was not final by any means. The report also detailed why the South Vietnamese did not perceive reduced funding as an emergency. The equipment, ordered and funded in 1956, had only recently finished arriving in country and the 1957 equipment would arrive soon. This meant that the withholding of funds had no immediate impact on the Vietnamese. Unfortunately for the Civil Guard, the report paid more attention to traffic and communication modernization.¹²² This showed that the MSUG team was beginning to move its focus into areas they felt were making gains.

The MSUG priorities can easily be seen when their manning is assessed. In the summer of 1958, only two MSUG personnel were advising the Civil Guard, an organization of around fifty thousand. The VBI, on the other hand, had six advisors working with the internal security section and another advisor working with the criminal section. The second largest single commitment of manpower for the police administration

¹²¹“Michigan State University Monthly Progress Report,” February 17, 1958, Michigan State University Archives, Ralph Turner Collection, box 1695, East Lansing, MI. The reason for excitement surrounding Le-Khuong was not stated in the document.

¹²²“Seventh Report of the Michigan State Advisory Group,” June 30, 1958, 4-10, Texas Tech Vietnam Archive, Lubbock, TX.

was the research and training section.¹²³ This revealed two things about the MSUG advisors; they were tired of the controversy surrounding the Civil Guard and they no longer viewed it as the future of internal security in South Vietnam.

Additionally, the report outlined four training courses that focused on the VBI. MSUG established VBI courses for command, fingerprinting, instructor training, and revolver training. In the case of the Civil Guard, the only two courses were the officer course and the non-commissioned officer course. Additionally, the report paid a great deal of attention to the fingerprinting efforts and records centralization programs under the VBI.¹²⁴ While these two efforts were vital in a western police force, they did not seem as vital to this type of police structure.

The report covering the second half of 1958 did not show any improvement for the Civil Guard. In December, the MSUG advisors were still being held back by decisions out of their control. The report admitted that the Civil Guard was the one dark spot in MSUG's efforts. They felt like they were seeing marked improvement across the board in their other areas. Moreover, another change occurred in the Civil Guard's leadership. This was the fifth time the Civil Guard's leadership had changed in the last three and a half years.¹²⁵ With that much leadership instability, it is doubtful that the advisors could have made much of a difference.

¹²³Ibid., 24.

¹²⁴Ibid., 6-8.

¹²⁵Ralph H. Smuckler, "Eighth Report of the Michigan State Advisory Group," December 31, 1958, 22-23, Texas Tech Vietnam Archive, Lubbock, TX.

The MSUG monthly reports revealed an understanding of the program's future in the winter of 1958-1959 report. The December monthly report examined the need to conduct train-the-trainer programs for the Vietnamese.¹²⁶ The team acknowledged that the South Vietnamese became dependent on American instruction. Throughout 1958, the team had worked diligently to translate all of their instruction manuals and training aids into Vietnamese to give the Vietnamese ownership of their training programs. By February 1959, the train-the-trainer programs were the major effort in the program.¹²⁷

Despite the MSUG advisor's efforts, the battle for the Civil Guard was quickly being lost. The second contract renewal was due in the spring of 1959. The Civil Guard was not going to fall under the responsibility of the university team any longer. The decision was in accordance with the wishes of the university and USOM.¹²⁸ The dispute, however, continued between the state department and MAAG over the future of the Civil Guard and its security role in South Vietnam. The dispute continued, in part, because the State Department reinstated the money flow in January 1959.¹²⁹ This allowed Diem to continue to waiver about the future of the Civil Guard.

With the Civil Guard now under the Public Safety Division of USOM, MAAG renewed its efforts to have the Civil Guard placed under its responsibility. It took a year.

¹²⁶"Monthly Report," December 5, 1958, Michigan State University Archive, East Lansing, MI.

¹²⁷"Monthly Report," February 12, 1959, Michigan State University Archive, East Lansing, MI.

¹²⁸Ralph H. Smuckler, "Ninth Report of the Michigan State University Advisory Group," June 30, 1959, 23-24, Texas Tech University Vietnam Archive, Lubbock, TX.

¹²⁹William Rosenau, *US Internal Security Assistance to South Vietnam*, 71.

By September 1960, the Civil Guard was under MAAG's tutelage. The American military immediately went to work to develop the Civil Guard into a counter guerrilla force.¹³⁰ Unfortunately by the late summer of 1960, the usefulness of the Civil Guard as a counter guerrilla force was in question. The Communist insurgency in South Vietnam was again underway with newfound vigor.

1954-1960, A View from the North

A decade prior to US involvement in Vietnamese affairs, Ho Chi Minh would have welcomed the United States' support. He respected many aspects of US foreign policy despite his communist ideology. By 1954, his respect for the United States vanished. From his point of view, the United States was no different from France; it was a western power that wanted to subjugate the Vietnamese for profit and prestige. From the US perspective, Ho was nothing more than a communist puppet that must be stopped. Little did the Truman and Eisenhower administrations realize that Ho's message of nationalism and self-determination was what the Vietnamese sought following World War Two.¹³¹

The role North Vietnam would play in the future of South Vietnam was not pre-ordained in 1954, but Diem's and the United States' actions soon showed Ho and his most faithful supporters the path to unification. The US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) continued its activities in Vietnam following the 1954 Geneva Conference. Between 1954 and 1957, the CIA predicted that North Vietnam would favor subversive

¹³⁰Ibid., 73-74.

¹³¹Karnow, *Vietnam, A History*, 97-98.

efforts to destabilize the South over an overt invasion. Hanoi, however, watched the Diem regime closely and responded to its actions.

Soon after the Geneva Accords, Le Duan, a rising member of the party who rose to prominence between 1954 and 1960, pushed the North to take a more active role in South Vietnam. While Ho could not control the actions of the roughly ten thousand communist supporters left in South Vietnam, he would not authorize Le Duan to organize them into a full-scale guerrilla effort. In fact, Ho was pleased with the outcome of the Geneva Accords because he, like the American authorities, was confident he would beat Diem in open and fair elections. This created an internal division within the communist party's leadership. Le Duan and his supporters wanted a more active military role to support the southern Communists, others, largely Northerners, wanted to limit their involvement to political and material support.¹³²

While Ho was busy in the North establishing his own government and economic policies in 1955 and 1956, he left Le Duan in the South to continue to generate popular support. Le Duan did this in part with his key piece of propaganda, "The Path to Revolution in the South."¹³³ In 1954, when most communist leaders moved to the North, Le Duan remained in the Mekong Delta region to continue to monitor the situation in South Vietnam. Le Duan organized the party in the South into three regions and had a monitoring system in place when Diem and the US established a South Vietnamese government.

¹³²William J. Duiker, *U.S. Containment Policy and the Conflict in Indo-China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 225-229.

¹³³Lien-hang T. Nguyen, *Hanoi's War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 33.

Ho trusted Le Duan because of their long history. As early as 1928, Le Duan was involved with the anti-colonial struggle in Vietnam. He was a member of the early communist party of Vietnam. Le Duan's activity was dampened in 1931 when French authorities arrested and imprisoned him. He remained in prison throughout World War Two, but like many of his fellow Viet Minh supporters, Le Duan emerged a more fervent communist and nationalist than ever.

Le Duan returned to the active revolutionary fight against French colonialism after the war. He directed communist operations in southern Vietnam, an unenviable task. Though Le Duan wished to remain loyal and connected to Hanoi, those he coordinated with were often independent operators. He was also much closer to the French power base in Saigon, making him an easier target for the French and their colonial forces. Despite these challenges, Le Duan successfully negotiated the pitfalls of his assignment and emerged in 1954 as a loyal supporter who could operate south of the seventeenth parallel with relative ease.¹³⁴

Because of his knowledge of the operational environment, Le Duan was the perfect choice to be Hanoi's southern face. While residing at the Saigon party headquarters in 1954, he wrote his manifesto. It laid out a simple plan to conduct a political movement in the South supported by guerrilla actions by armed party members. Party leaders received the manifesto at the second plenum that took place in Cambodia in late 1956. Members agreed that it was a good plan and sent Le Duan back to the Mekong region to begin preparations. All agreed that it was still too soon to use violence to any

¹³⁴Ibid., 19-25.

great extent, Le Duan and his operatives pursued the political initiatives to undermine the Diem regime.¹³⁵

This plan was the only realistic option that could have taken place in the late 1950s. The establishment of a new government and implementing its extensive economic programs in the North was equally as painstaking as it was in the South. There were those, such as Le Duan, who focused on a South-first agenda, but Ho understood that the campaign would have a better chance of success if he had tangible results to show the southern Vietnamese. His land reform efforts were extensive but not always effective. Even so, by 1957, North Vietnam was stabilizing under communist rule. Le Duan, however, would renew his efforts to reunify Vietnam by demanding aggressive action in the South.¹³⁶

More specifically, Le Duan assumed Vo Nguyen Giap's responsibilities for writing "Resolution 15"—the blueprint for national reunification. The politburo in Hanoi agreed that the time was approaching to use force to seek their ultimate objective of unification under communist rule. By now, it was apparent to Ho that there was no other way to unite the country, especially with increased US support to the Diem regime. Some believed the North needed more work before it was ready to provide economic or morale support to war in the South. Others believed that all efforts should be focused on the South. Ho and Le Duan believed that a war with the US might be the uniting factor that would bind the country together against another colonial power. Le Duan understood that

¹³⁵Ibid., 33-34.

¹³⁶Ibid., 35-45.

the US had to use military means first; then the communists could answer in kind.¹³⁷ “We won’t use war to unify the country, but if the United States and its puppets use war, then we have to use war, and the war threat the enemy has initiated will be an opportunity for us to unify the country.”¹³⁸

Following the party meeting, Le Duan returned to South Vietnam. The situation he found was ideal for insurgency. By the spring of 1959, Diem’s regime had alienated most, if not all, of the rural population from the central government. Le Duan knew the time was right for revolution in the South. Diem’s government could not protect these rural villages effectively due to the poor state of the Civil Guard and the focus of the South Vietnamese Army on conventional war. “The growing discontent in the villages played into the hands of the revolutionary leadership in the south and spread it to greater efforts to gear up for a major attempt to bring down the Diem Regime.”¹³⁹

Ostensibly, the MSUG and the Diem government designed the Civil Guard to be the internal security agency that protected the rural villages in the name of the central government. They were also the element that should have collected intelligence on communist actions in the South. The inability of the Civil Guard to gain the trust of the civilian population and to provide a positive influence in the name of the Diem regime allowed the communists to pursue their agenda more effectively. If the Diem regime had only properly trained, resourced, and led the Civil Guard as the MSUG suggested,

¹³⁷Ibid.

¹³⁸Ibid., 45.

¹³⁹Duiker, *US Containment Policy and the Conflict in Indo-China*, 234.

perhaps the South Vietnamese government could have hindered the communist efforts in the South.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

It seems to me South Vietnam must take whatever means are necessary to guarantee its freedom and to bring tranquility and order to the countryside. If Diem's position is to make the entire police forces part of the military forces of the country in order to cope with the threat confronting Vietnam, then I would accept this decision, but also make plans for an orderly return to a civilian police force when the threat has been eliminated.¹⁴⁰

--- Arthur Brandstatter to Ralf Turner, February 3, 1961

Future Possible Research

The MSUG and their advisory efforts are largely a side-note in the history of the Vietnam War. As research and analysis begins on American actions in Iraq and Afghanistan, there will no doubt be comparisons with Vietnam to determine if lessons were learned. In all three scenarios, the United States attempted to emplace a new government, quell an insurgency or revolution, and build security forces simultaneously. The prioritization of lines of effort, command structure between civil and military authorities, and the role of contract personnel are points that need to be assessed.

The relationship between the military and civil police organizations is a point of contention in counter-insurgency operations. On many occasions in Malaya and Northern Ireland, the British government subordinated the military to civil police organizations. This allowed the population to see police forces conducting traditional western roles in their communities. In Iraq and Afghanistan, the host nation military was the US and coalition forces' training priority. The same appeared to be true in Vietnam during the

¹⁴⁰ Arthur Brandstatter, Letter to Ralph Turner February 3, 1961, 2, Michigan State University Archive, Ralph Turner Papers, Box 1694, East Lansing, MI.

1950s. A comparative study concerning the two approaches and the implications of military actions within its own borders versus actions in foreign countries would be useful. United States Army doctrine supports military subordination to civil authorities in Defense Support to Civil Authorities, but this model is rarely followed during nation building operations. A study needs to determine if it is possible to follow this model during an internal crisis or with a weak central government.

In addition to the possibilities surrounding Defense Support to Civil Authorities, the Department of Homeland Security could assume some role in US-led nation building efforts. In 1956, when MSUG suggested the creation of a Council of National Security Affairs, they were describing an organization similar to the Department of Homeland Security. The U.S. only recently developed this framework for integrating the military into issues within its own borders. The use of the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation and other investigative agencies has proved useful to the U.S. military abroad. The use of these types of agencies in a counter insurgency environment to tie all security elements together needs to be developed and studied for application at home and abroad.

Additionally, the training program MAAG used for the Civil Guard after 1960 needs more study to determine if it could have prevented the insurgency from gaining momentum in 1959. This study may not be viable since MAAG knew an insurgency was in place in 1960, when they became the responsible party. Although MAAG lobbied continuously to assume training responsibility for the Civil Guard, it is unclear if such a transfer of responsibility would have resulted in a more positive outcome for Diem's government. The study should center on a revolution based on Mao's revolutionary

model and the application of power through phase zero operations.¹⁴¹ During the earliest phase of revolution, the political element was the primary effort. As a result, the prominence of the political movement negated the military's effectiveness against guerrilla and conventional forces. During this phase, the military may not be the best asset to combat the revolution. If not, who, under current US government structure, should lead the operations? An expeditionary arm of the Department of Homeland Security or a more active proponent inside the Department of State may prove a more suitable actor than the U.S. military.

Conclusions

The growing communist insurgency in South Vietnam developed in a unique environment with a multitude of political and military variables. Nationalism, anti-colonialism, religious tension, a weak central government, and outside pressure from North Vietnam all contributed to the communist insurgency. Likewise, no single point of failure in South Vietnam was responsible for the circumstances that led to the turbulent decade that lay ahead. Issues with MSU's plan, the US military's plan, and the South Vietnamese government combined to prevent the Civil Guard from playing a pivotal role in the detection and defeat of a fledgling Communist insurgency/revolution prior to 1958.

¹⁴¹Though the Vietnamese developed their own revolutionary model of Dau Tranh, it is largely based on Mao's revolutionary model. Most recent revolutions can be placed in the context of Mao's model despite the lack of communist ideology. Phase zero is that described in current US Joint Doctrine, when the United States is not directly involved against a military aggressor.

Michigan State's Role

When the FOA hired MSU to assist in its nation-building program, it was new territory for all parties involved in the project. Prior to this, the US primarily used its military to conduct nation rebuilding following a war. Reconstruction and stability efforts in Japan, Germany, and South Korea were primarily military operations led by military professionals. Additionally, these countries had existing governments prior to the war, which meant some form of government infrastructure existed prior to US involvement. Once the French left, the US and South Vietnamese had to build a nation and its associated infrastructure from virtually nothing.

The MSU advisors realized two key points regarding internal security early in the nation-building process. First, South Vietnam's population was more rural than the US. Second, western police models might not be the best method for policing in South Vietnam. These two realizations refuted claims that the MSUG advisors were "meddlesome" people who were essentially functioning beyond their expertise.¹⁴² These men were educated professionals who earnestly wanted to make South Vietnam a more secure country. They used the models and templates they knew best and tried to apply American policing methods to an unfamiliar situation, a growing insurgency in a developing nation.

The evidence suggests that the advisors were genuinely concerned over South Vietnam's future. Ralph Smuckler, an associate dean who had worked with the program, concluded, "the failure to maintain internal security throughout the country was not the

¹⁴²William Rosenau, *US Internal Security Assistance to South Vietnam, Insurgency Subversion and Public Order* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 66.

result of the advice given to the Government of Vietnam by MSUG, but more the result of the failure of the Government of Vietnam to base its internal strength on its people rather than upon its army.”¹⁴³ These men took the apparent failure of the program seriously. They sought to understand why the program failed and if a similar program could succeed in the future.

Ralph Turner, who became part of the mission in Vietnam during the second contract period, wrote a paper in January 1961 concerning the future of police advising. His paper read more like a brief history of the program and the major issues surrounding the Civil Guard. He acknowledged that MSUG advisors pushed for a civil police force with conventional police armament trained to administer civil law. From the perspective of the MSUG advisors, the security situation improved from 1957-1959. Turner, however, also acknowledged that deterioration in South Vietnam’s overall security began in late 1958. He closed the paper by speculating on the future of law enforcement in countries like Vietnam, wondering if a hybrid of police and military force could provide security to the population.¹⁴⁴ However, the theory remained untested because MSU was no longer involved in South Vietnam by this point.

The evidence shows that the MSU personnel developed a deep understanding of the security situation in South Vietnam. They understood the problems that Diem’s government faced and the relationship the government needed to have with its people for their internal security model to work. They also appreciated the working relationship the

¹⁴³Ralph Smuckler, Letter in response to letter chain, March 3, 1961, 5, Michigan State University Archive, East Lansing, MI.

¹⁴⁴Ralph Turner, Letter to Arthur Brandstatter, January 24, 1961, Michigan State University Archive, East Lansing, MI.

military and police forces needed in this type of environment. The advisors' failures centered on a lack of knowledge on how to train and develop a counter insurgency force capable of protecting the population in the name of the central government.

MAAG's Role

MAAG also shares a certain amount of responsibility. Like the leaders in USOM, MAAG's leadership was part of Diem's inner circle of advisors. They should have had deeper understanding about the situation in South Vietnam since they had been active in the country since 1951. They also had a more developed understanding of the global and local situation, especially about other communist revolutions in the region. MAAG's failure was attributed to a lack of unity of command, biases from recent experience, and focusing too much on the most dangerous course of action and not the current situation.

Throughout the 1950s, MAAG's chain of command did not develop a shared vision with their civilian counterparts in South Vietnam. While MSUG and the USOM reported through the ambassador to the State Department, MAAG's chain of command went directly to CINCPAC then to the Department of Defense. While there is plenty of evidence to support claims that there was an open dialogue between MAAG and USOM in South Vietnam, neither had command authority over the other.¹⁴⁵ As military officers, MAAG's leadership understood that unity of command, or central decision authority, was a crucial piece of successful operations missing in South Vietnam.

The lack of unity between USOM and MAAG led to other issues as well. In several instances, MAAG and USOM leadership presented Diem with opposing

¹⁴⁵See Appendix E.

viewpoints. This allowed Diem to choose the course of action that supported his own agenda. Instead, MAAG and USOM should have presented Diem a unified front on key decisions, such as the roles and structure of internal security forces in South Vietnam. This style is contradictory to good military staff models, but advisory efforts to foreign leaders and staff advice to a commander are different situations. The US effort in South Vietnam needed a single American decision maker who was ultimately responsible for providing Diem with a plan to build South Vietnam into a viable, self-sustaining nation.

MAAG also ignored CIA intelligence estimates concerning external threats to South Vietnam. While MAAG trained the South Vietnamese Army to oppose an invasion across the seventeenth parallel, the CIA continued to argue that subversive tactics were most likely to be employed to ignite an internal revolution rather than invasion. If the decision had been made earlier to move the Civil Guard under the MOD, MAAG would have trained them to secure rear areas. Security of rear areas probably included some form of counter-guerrilla tactics, but it would not have been the Civil Guard's primary mission. MAAG ignored the most likely course of action. Instead, MAAG focused on defeating the most dangerous course of action. MAAG's responsibility was to defeat the most likely course of action, subversive actions, while accounting for the most dangerous, conventional military action.

The reason MAAG planned for conventional war was most likely due to recent military experience in Korea. The US trained the South Korean military to defeat guerrilla actions. When North Korea invaded in June 1950, the South Korean military was incapable of conducting a conventional war. This "lesson" on countering the communist threat was not lost to the US military in South Vietnam. MAAG retained a

planning bias focused on conventional warfare with communist forces rather than the actual threat. This was a reasonable assumption at the time, but it ignored the situation on the ground.

Diem's Role

MSUG and MAAG had no direct input in the decision that placed Diem in power. The decision to make Diem the leader of South Vietnam was ultimately what brought MSU into the equation. Throughout much of the literature, Diem is identified as the underlying reason for much of the government's internal conflict. After the successful coup d'état in 1963, he was the easy scapegoat for eight years of failure. The French never supported Diem and, until the spring of 1955, his future as the leader of South Vietnam was in jeopardy. Diem possessed a certain amount of guilt in the failure of the Civil Guard and the internal security situation. Revolving leadership, the lack of guidance, and a poor relationship with the population doomed the Civil Guard as an effective police force.

First, Diem created a revolving door of leadership in the Civil Guard. The fact that he used military leaders in a police organization was not as significant of a problem as the rapid rotation of leadership. An MSU report cited five leaders in three and a half years, or tenure of roughly eight months for the Civil Guard's key leader. In a time of turmoil, just as a leader began to understand the mission and organization of the Civil Guard fully, he went back to the Army. Leaders did not have the time to construct a plan, implement it, and make final adjustments to produce results. It was unclear how much influence, if any, the advisors had over the placement of key individuals in the regime, but a unified effort should have been made to stabilize key leadership billets

Second, Diem's inability to articulate a clear vision of security roles in his country prevented progress. Poor communication between Diem and his advisors was the root of this problem. The lack of understanding between Diem and the US advisors resulted from each side having quite different views of the situation and resulted in undue friction. Certainly, Diem wanted a more militarized Civil Guard while those in USOM wanted a civil police entity. The failure to communicate revolves around each party's inability to explain their position. If Diem could have articulated why he needed a para-military force that transcended the MOI and MOD, the US advisors may have been more receptive to the idea. Likewise, the advisors should have worked to pull that information out of Diem and his supporters.

Finally, Diem failed to gain the support of his population. Diem alienated much of the rural population through policies and heavy-handed approaches. This only helped fan the flame of insurgency in the South. Some historians have gone as far as to suggest that Diem used the MSUG programs to aggravate the situation in rural communities. The Civil Guard was Diem's tool to gain support for the central government in rural areas through centralized coercion. To accomplish this, the central ministries in Saigon should have governed their own security elements. Instead, Diem placed the security forces under the provincial civilian authorities. American's should not have expected anything else from Diem. As a mandarin steeped in Confucian culture, Diem believed himself to possess the "mandate of heaven," and that the population was there to serve him. To Americans who generally believe that the government is there to serve the people, such a perspective is alien and backwards. To a peasant farmer in rural South Vietnam, however, this appeared to be a reinforcement of the traditional social order. It allowed a

nationalistic agenda, pushed by the Vietminh and Viet Cong, to appear better than the tribal system Vietnam had used for centuries. The nationalistic agenda appeared to be more democratic than the centuries old caste system.

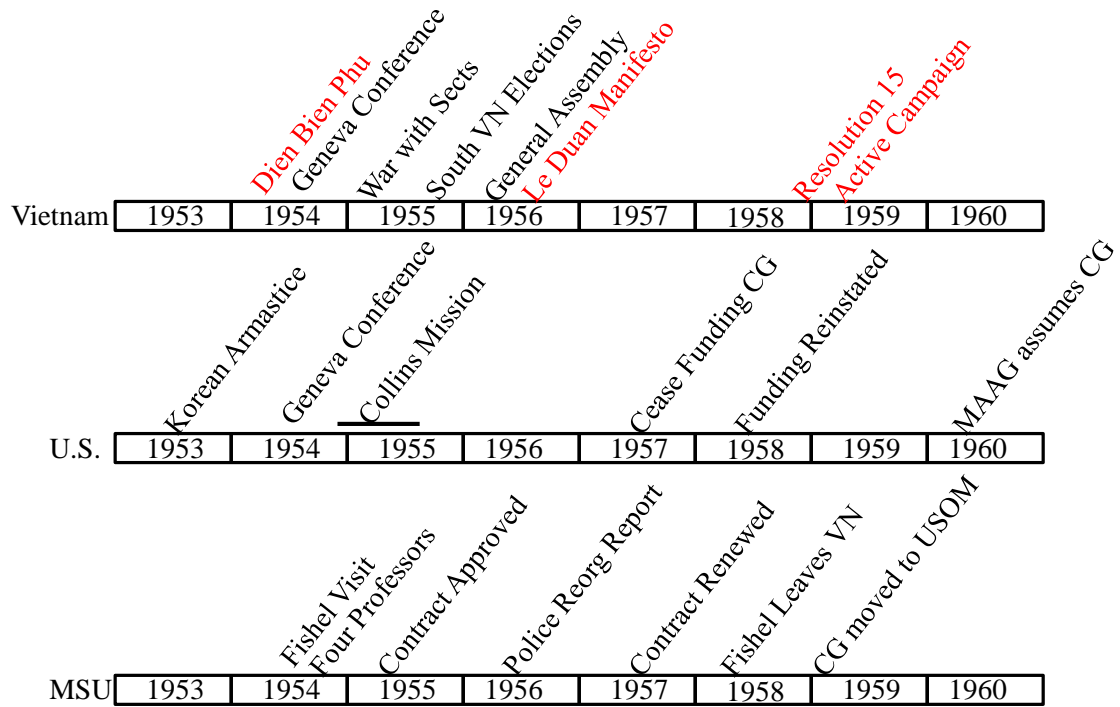
Although the decision to support Diem was ultimately made in Washington D.C., and not in Saigon, the people with day-to-day contact should have painted the picture more clearly to Washington. To say those in Saigon could have applied more pressure is not a fair critique. An advisor must walk a tenuous line that pushes the advisee in the desired direction while maintaining the self-esteem of that individual. Diem made several questionable decisions during his presidency. Although MSU personnel discussed the future of the Civil Guard, it was only one of many issues USOM and MAAG dealt with on a day-to-day basis.

MSU's experience in Vietnam needs to be studied by organizations in the U.S. involved with nation building programs. In 1955, these professionals set out to support their government in its global engagement strategy. They certainly did not go to South Vietnam to start a war that would rage on in Southeast Asia for thirteen years after they left. The U.S. government continues to contract out for this type of expertise. Contractors who worked for a corporation rather than a university replaced MSU in Iraq and Afghanistan. The method used to get the desired knowledge in foreign countries did not change. In the late 1960s, MSU was ridiculed for attempting something no one else dared in 1955. Instead, those people should be commended for answering their nation's call and attempting to help those who had been needed it. The institutions of the government who are responsible for nation building need to study the efforts of Michigan State University

to find a better way to conduct business rather than replacing a university with a corporation and expecting different results.

APPENDIX A

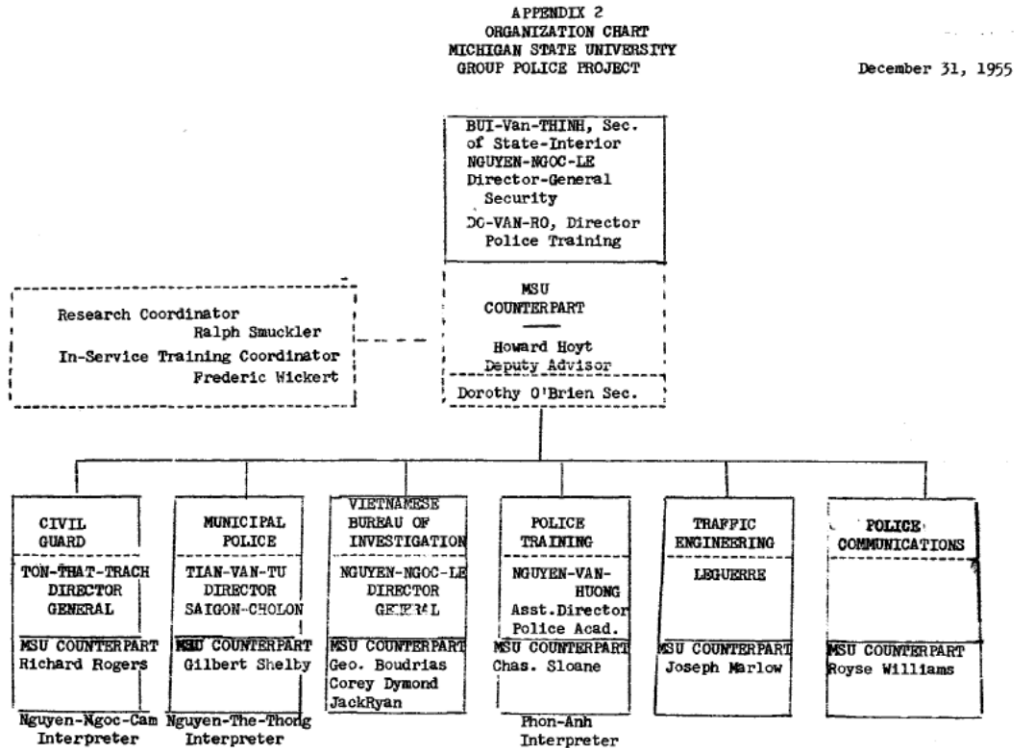
VIETNAM TIMELINE



APPENDIX B

INITIAL COMPOSITION OF MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY POLICE

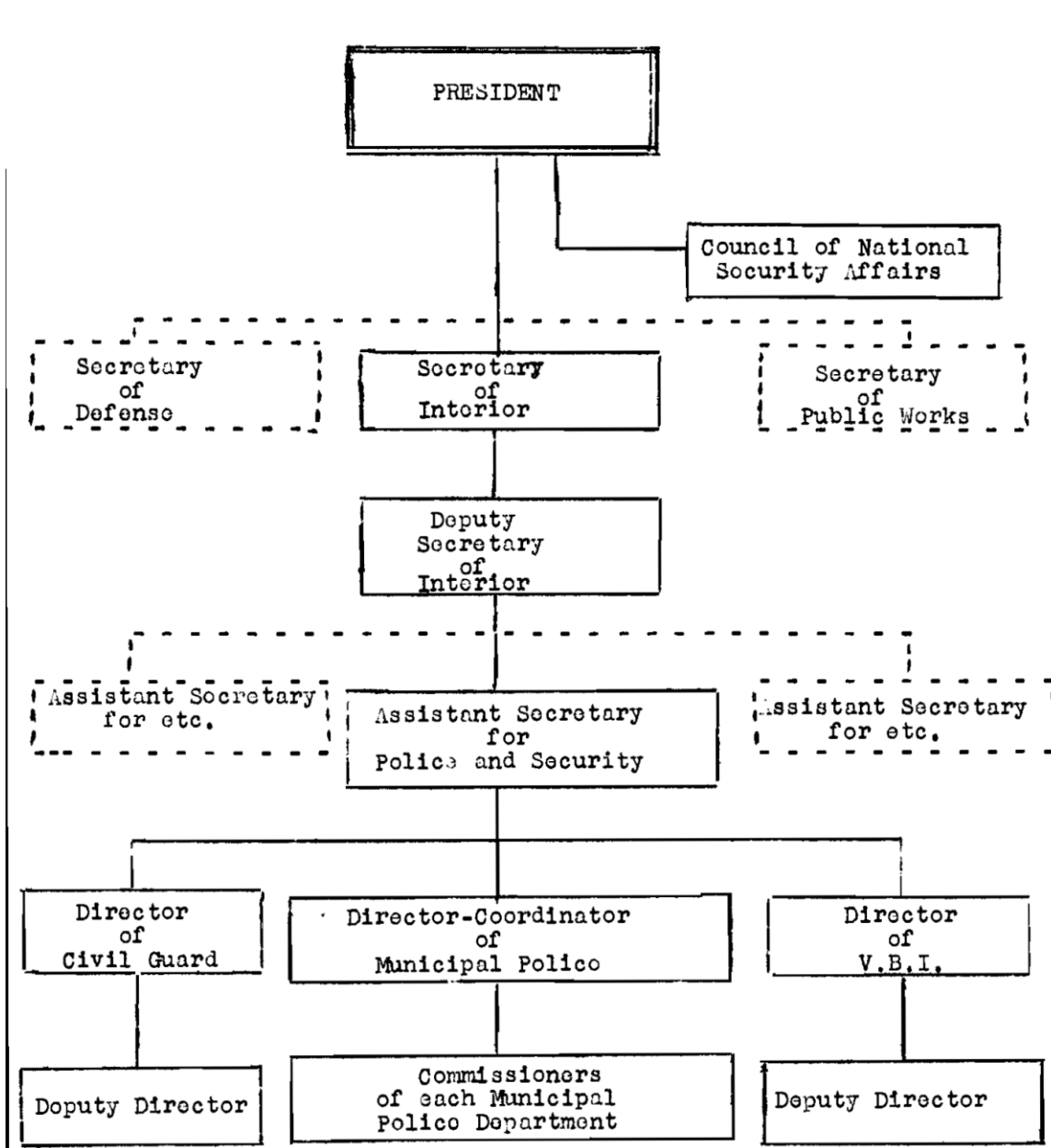
ADVISING TEAM



Source: Wesley Fishel, "Second Report of the Michigan State University Vietnam Advisory Team," December 31, 1955, Appendix 2, Texas Tech Vietnam Archive, Lubbock, TX.

APPENDIX C

PROPOSED REORGANIZATION OF THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES



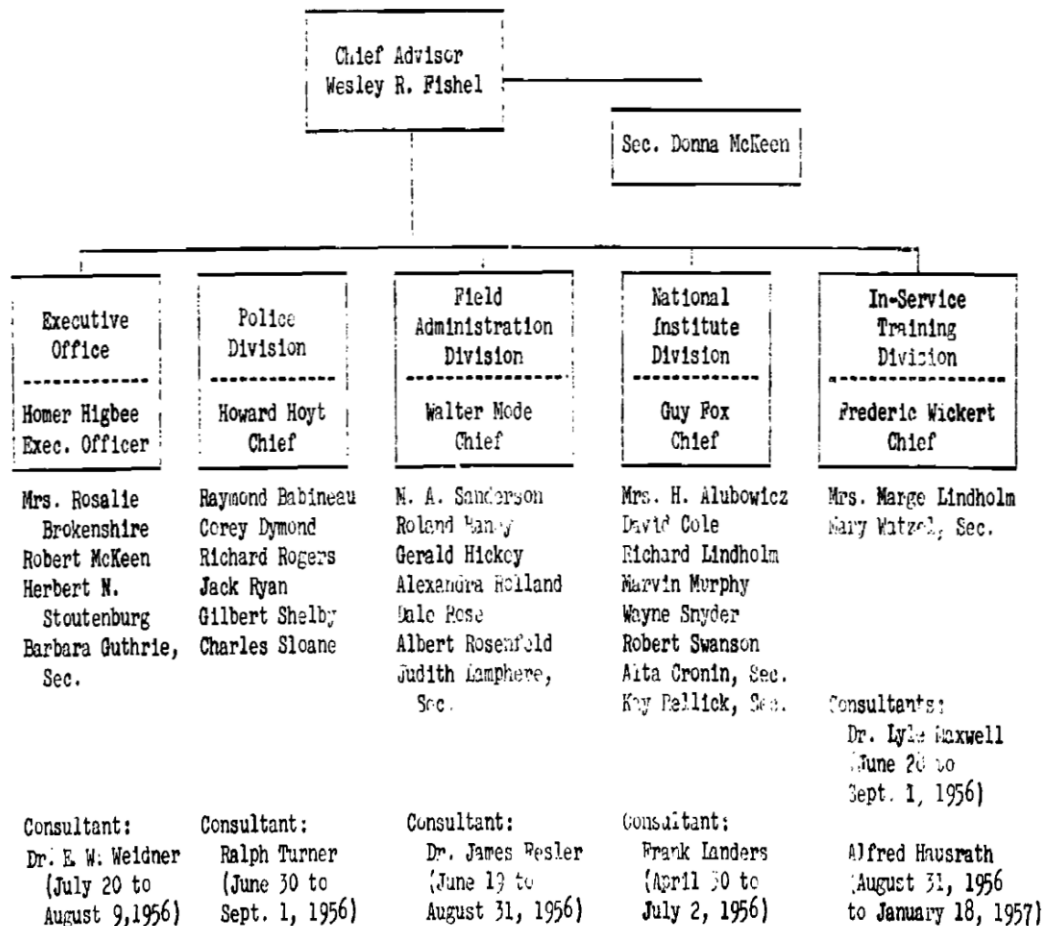
Source: "Report on the Proposed Organization of the Law Enforcement Agencies of the Republic of Vietnam" April, 1956, 4, Michigan State University Archive, Wesley Fishel Papers, East Lansing, MI.

APPENDIX D

MSU ORGANIZATION CHARTS FROM DECEMBER 1956 AND DECEMBER 1957

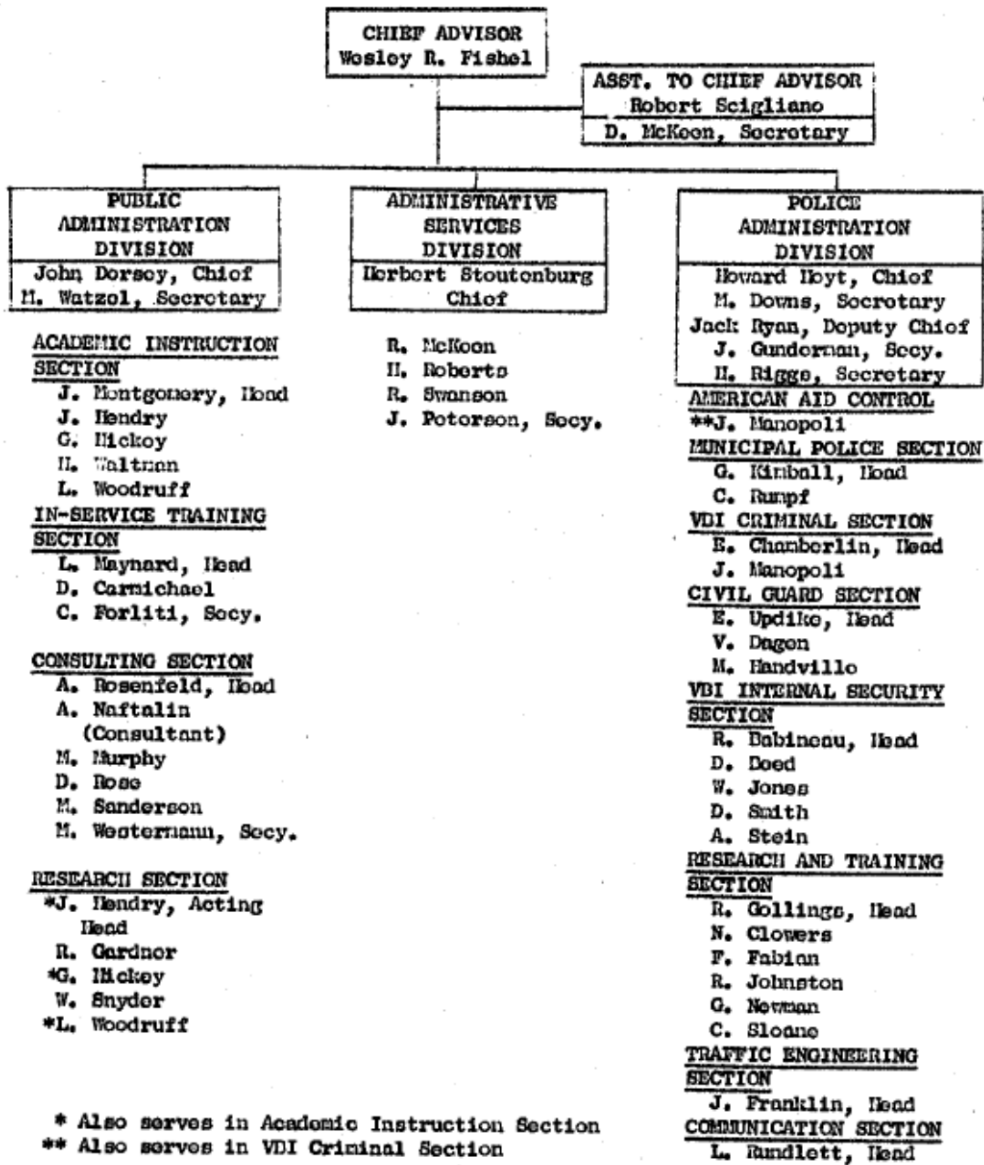
APPENDIX 1

MSUG ORGANIZATION DECEMBER 31, 1956



Source: Wesley Fishel, "Fourth Report of the Michigan State University Vietnam Advisory Team," December 31, 1956, Appendix 1, Texas Tech Vietnam Archive, Lubbock, TX.

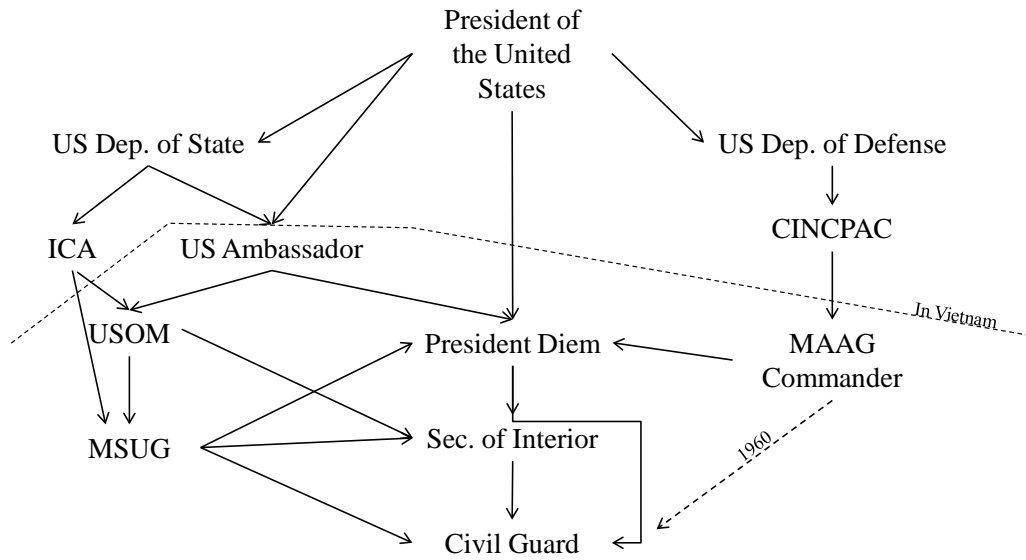
ORGANIZATION OF
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY GROUP
(MSU Board-Appointed American Staff)
December 31, 1957



Source: Wesley Fishel, "Sixth Report of the Michigan State University Vietnam Advisory Team," December 31, 1955, Appendix 2, Texas Tech Vietnam Archive, Lubbock, TX.

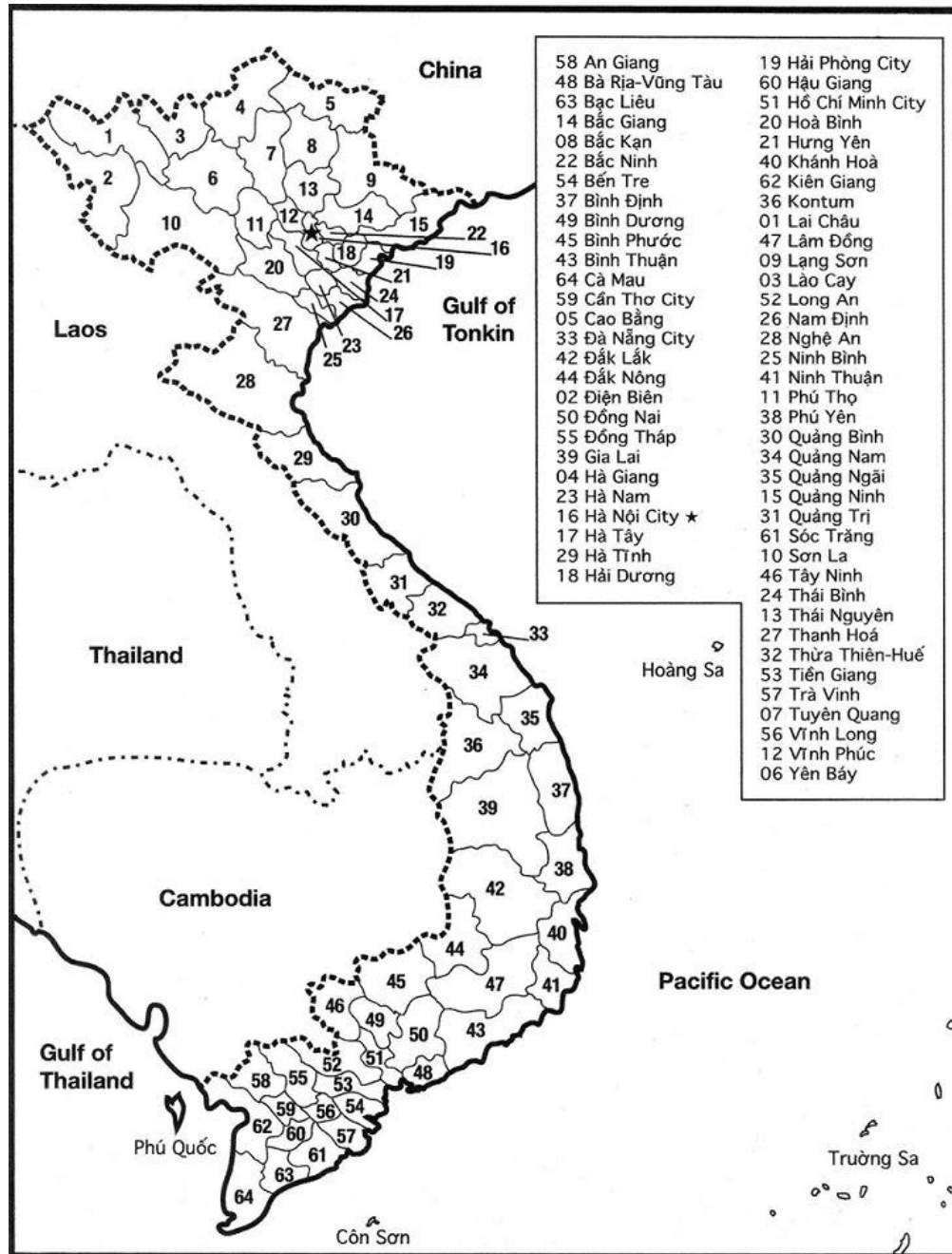
APPENDIX E

COMMUNICATION DIAGRAM



APPENDIX F

MAP OF VIETNAM



Source: A Story of Vietnam, http://www.astoryofvietnam.com/_/rsr/1259731407539/chapter-1/01.%20Map%20of%20Vietnam%204%20CD.jpg (accessed May 16, 2014).

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